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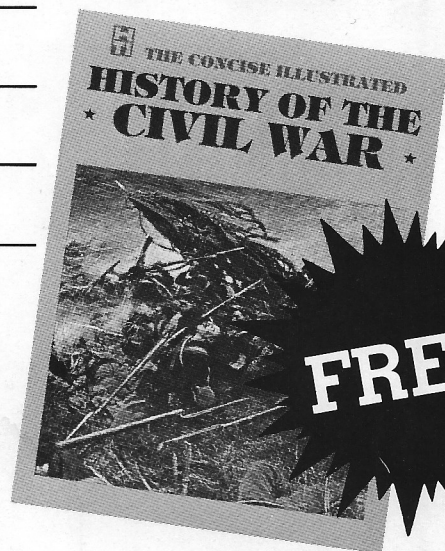
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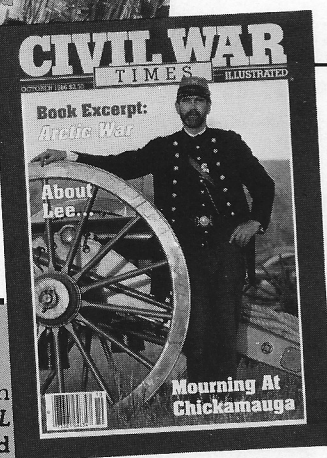
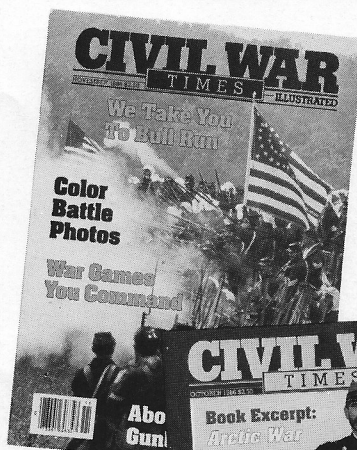
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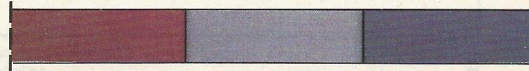
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# AMERICAN HISTORY ILLUSTRATED

VOLUME XXIII, NUMBER 10 FEBRUARY 1989 \$2.95



## Features

**14** **El Presidente Gringo** by Roger Bruns and Bryan Kennedy  
*This daring filibuster's odyssey as liberator and President of Nicaragua was brief—and bloody. His legacy is with us still.*

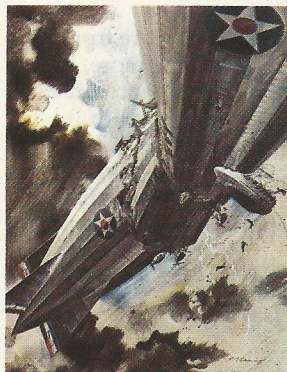
**22** **George Washington's False Teeth** by Joseph Gustaitis  
*Our first President's dental woes included aching and abscessed teeth, periodontal disease, and ill-fitting dentures.*

**24** **Shenandoah** by James W. Wensyel  
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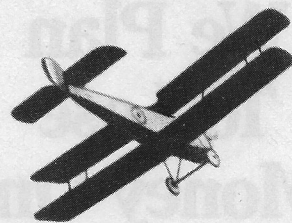
For nearly two years following her maiden flight in September 1923, the spectacle presented by the *Shenandoah*—the nation's first large rigid airship—thrilled millions of Americans. But the Navy dirigible's spectacular career ended abruptly on September 3, 1925, when she broke up after encountering a severe line squall over eastern Ohio. An account of the *Shenandoah*—and of her last flight—appears in this issue.

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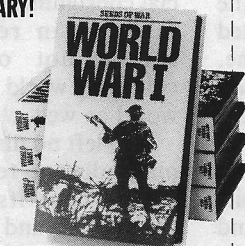
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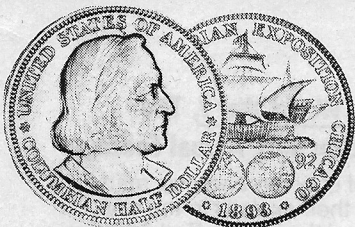
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## Mailbox

### Taft President When?

In the December 1988 "History Today" department, you stated that William Howard Taft was President from 1908 to 1912. This is incorrect. He was elected in 1908, but took office in 1909. His term was from 1909 to 1913.

[Nevertheless], I enjoy your publication very much and have been a longtime subscriber.

Jack Strand  
Belleville, Michigan

### Louis Prang Diaries

I read with interest Kathleen Doyle's article, "Louis Prang" [December 1988 issue]. I have in my possession several of the Louis Prang diaries, the end of one partially written in German by his wife, along with several engineering sketches he made. I've often thought of compiling a book [about Prang].

Judy Duffee  
Marshfield, Massachusetts

### Prang Facts Elusive

I thoroughly enjoyed Kathleen Doyle's article, "Louis Prang" [December 1988 issue]. During the past several years I have stumbled across only minute bits of information about Louis. The interest is obvious, the gap immense. I do know that my paternal grandmother was Prussian-born and immigrated with her parents when she was about twelve years old. My father is the oldest of seven children born to Samuel and Lydia Prang in North Dakota in 1900.

Ron Prang  
Rocky Mount, North Carolina

### Radio Nostalgia

Just read your October "Editor's Desk" on radio broadcasting of the 1930s and 1940s and was delighted with the trip down Memory Lane. [I particularly remember] *Suspense*, *The Shadow*, and *I Love a Mystery*. After listening to the squeaking door; and swinging across uncounted bottomless pits with Reggie, Doc, and Jack; and trying to figure out what the Shadow knew (and in modern parlance, when he knew it), I have of-

ten felt that my children and now grandchildren have been woefully deprived by having everything done for them on the TV screen. They don't know what they are missing, though, and I suppose will have no regrets. *Sic transit gloria mundi*.

Russell Vermillion  
Springfield, Virginia

### "War of the Worlds" Overrated?

I can't for the life of me understand the big deal that has been made of Orson Welles and his *War of the Worlds* [broadcast] back in '38 ["Night of the Martians," October issue]. Just about anyone who knows radio drama and has access to broadcasting equipment could scare the wits out of the populace by flashing a false report like that. If someone, almost anyone, were to broadcast a fictitious report of a Russian invasion of Grover's Mill today, what do you suppose would happen? Pandemonium.

Ninety-nine percent of the time I really enjoy your magazine.

Anton Kral  
Library, Pennsylvania

### Green's Son No Businessman?

Your article on Hetty Green [September issue] was most interesting but incomplete without relating how some of her hard-earned money was spent. [Her son] Ned spent considerable sums of his inheritance collecting stamps that he never intended as an investment; he had no desire to resell the collection at a profit.

Ned assembled one of the most extensive stamp collections in existence at that time. When the collection was sold by auction and special consignment after his death, [it brought] in record prices that rocked not only the stamp-collecting world but the investment world as well.

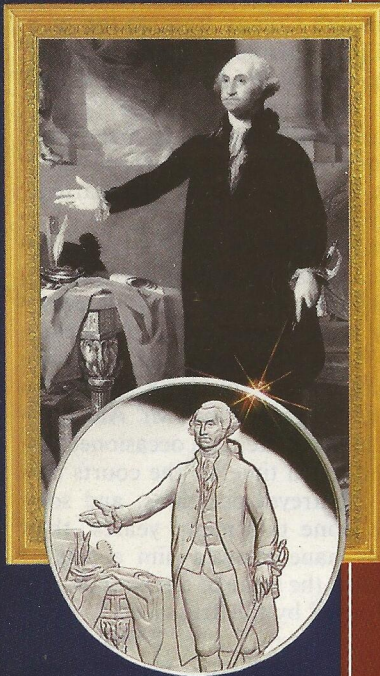
Ned left no direct heirs, although many distant relations did derive some benefits from Hetty's shrewdness and Ned's stamp collection.

I.L. Pfalser  
Caney, Kansas

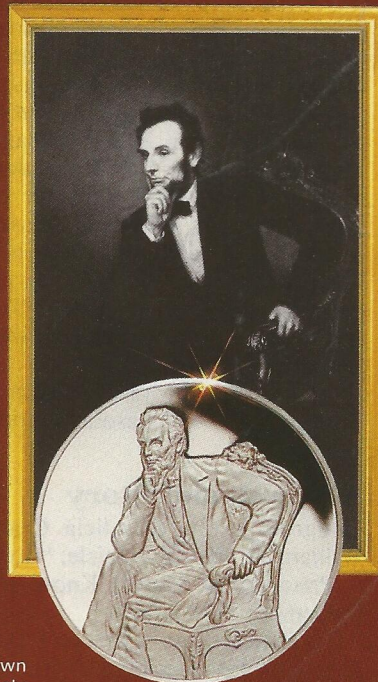


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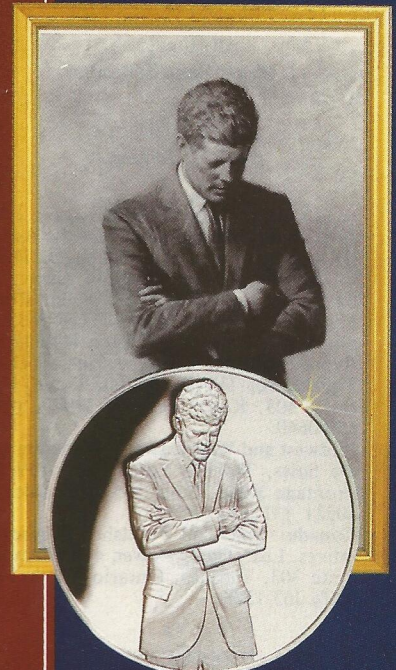
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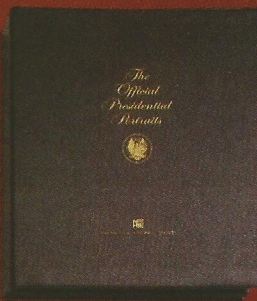
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## Mailbox

### Alden Offspring

Regarding "John & Priscilla, We Hardly Know Ye" [December 1988 issue], we noted the reference to the Ellen Russell and John Alden marriage. The name should be Elizabeth Russell (Priscilla and John's first child was Elizabeth). A 1586 will of William Russell, Harwich shipwright, states that he left property and ship interests to his offspring—John, Robert, Susan, Lucy, and deceased Elizabeth's family—including John Alden, Jr., godson. Ellen appears in the will as part of "brethren, Peter, William, Thomas, & Ellen." One wonders whether Ellen was a stepsister of John Alden, Jr. Elizabeth Russell Alden died in 1578, about the time John Alden, Jr., was born. Essex registers show John Alden, Jr., and Thomas were twins, baptized January 14, 1579.

Mrs. H. Dixon  
Sarasota, Florida

### A Wonderful Story

Congratulations to Alicia Crane Williams for her fine article, "John & Priscilla, We Hardly Know Ye" [December 1988 issue].

Three years ago I wrote to Dan Pearce, a past president of the Alden Kindred of America, and asked his opinion about the Miles Standish "courtship" legend. He explained that there was no historical evidence for the story, and then added, "Did it really happen? You be the judge. It is possible. But doesn't it make a wonderful story?"

Indeed it does! Incidentally, two other young *Mayflower* passengers—John Howland and Elizabeth Tilly—also married at Plymouth and had ten children who reached adulthood. These two couples have more descendants living in America today than any other early pioneers.

Frank C. Worbs  
Vanport, Pennsylvania

### More on Alden Legend

I found the article on John and Priscilla Alden [December 1988 issue] of great interest, particularly

because my own ancestor John Forbes (Fobes) was one of the original fifty-four proprietors of Duxbury, Massachusetts.

As to the story of Priscilla Alden riding the white bull, it is possible; I recall reading somewhere in the Plymouth Colony Records (on microfilm available through the genealogical library in Salt Lake City) that in the early days the "great white bull" was to be pastured around among the townspeople. The Records make fascinating reading.

Ms. Williams's account seems to indicate that the Aldens were rather prosperous, but apparently in 1660 they were having some financial problems, because the Colony Court Orders for June 13, 1660 state, "In regard that Mr. Alden is low in his estate, and occasioned to spend much time att the courts on the countreyes occations, and soe hath done this many yeares, the Court haue allowed him a smale gratuity, the sume of ten pounds, to bee payed by the Treasurer."

Verna Forbes Willson  
Farmington, New Mexico

*Author Alicia Crane Williams responds: The Aldens were prosperous enough in the early years for John to be one of only eight men to undertake the debt of the colony. Paying off that debt would not have been easy, and, as you point out, in 1660 John was given a stipend to cover his expenses as a magistrate. I would not interpret the phrase "Mr. Alden was low in his estate" as indicating the Alden family was destitute, however. By 1660 John and his son Jonathan had built their new, larger house on the hill above the old one, and in 1661 John was buying land from the Mashpee Indians.*

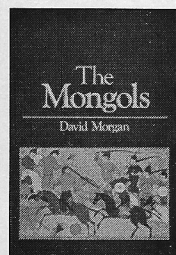
*The editors welcome comments from our readers. While we endeavor to publish a representative sampling of this correspondence, we regret that limited space prevents us from printing every letter. Address correspondence to The Mailbox, American History Illustrated, Box 8200, Harrisburg, PA 17105. ★*



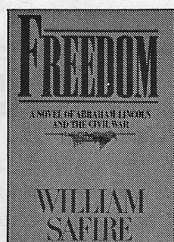
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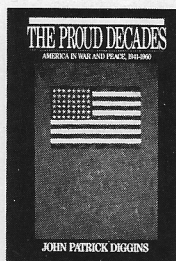
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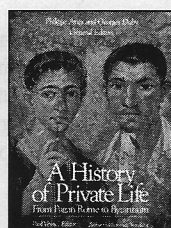
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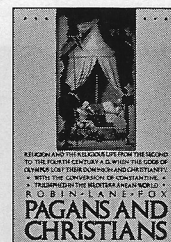
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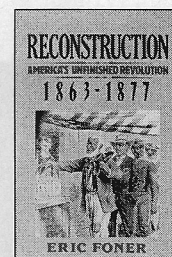
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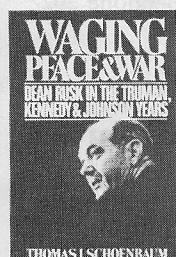
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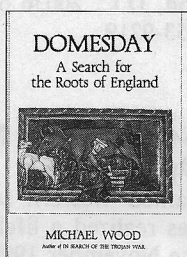
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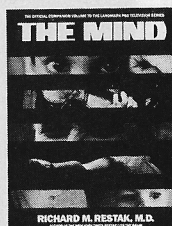
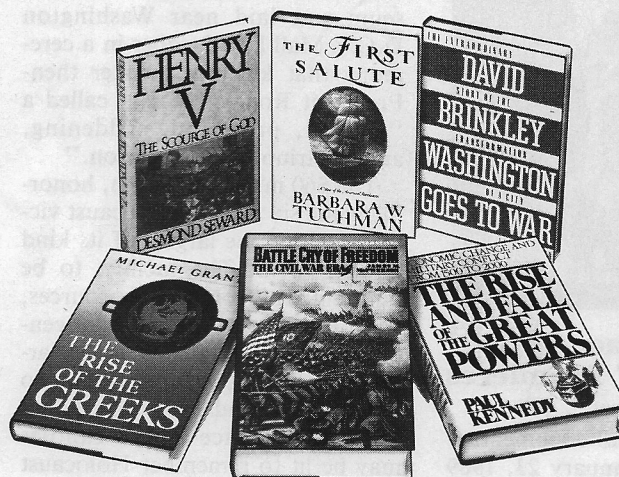


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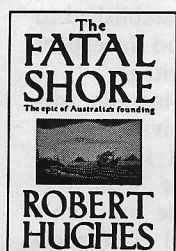
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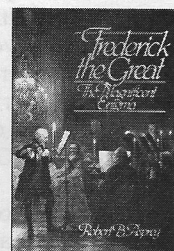
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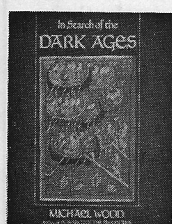
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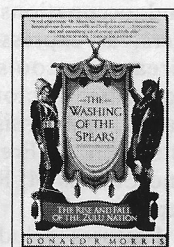
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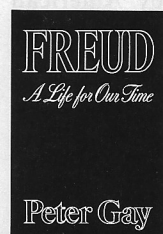
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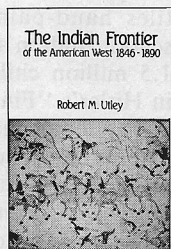
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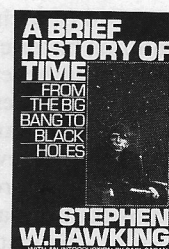
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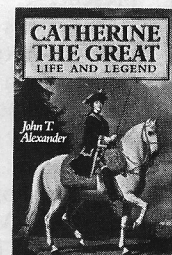
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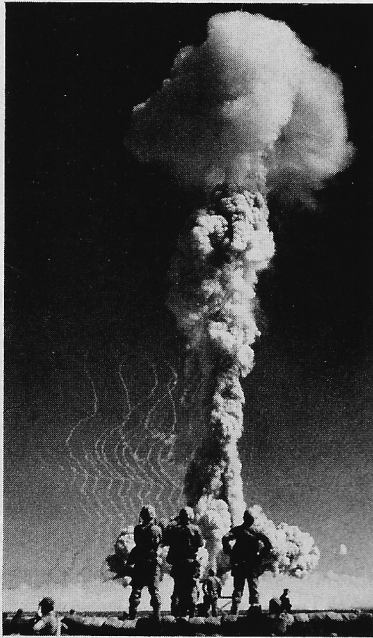
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## **“War and Peace in the Nuclear Age” Premieres on PBS**

A thirteen-week PBS documentary airing beginning January 23, 1989 (check local listings) will chart the nuclear age from the 1940s to the present.

The series is comprised of archival film footage featuring historical figures such as Nikita Krushchev, Robert Oppenheimer, John F. Kennedy, Henry Kissinger, and Howard MacMillan, plus recent interviews with key Soviet, American, European, and Asian arms control participants. The roles of scientists, the military, politicians, and laymen in the development of nuclear weapons and policy over the years will be examined.

The series' executive producer asks viewers to suspend moral judgments temporarily: "The story of the nuclear age is one with few villains or heroes. Rather," he says, "it is a story of people like you and me who, by accident of history, are forced to confront issues of extraordinary magnitude and complexity."

The series was produced through a cooperative effort by public and national television networks in the United States, England, and Japan. College credit for the "tele-

course" is available; call 1-800-LEARNER for information.

Alfred A. Knopf publishers has released a companion book of the same title by John Newhouse.

## **Holocaust Memorial Museum Underway**

The cornerstone for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum was laid near Washington D.C.'s Mall last October in a ceremony that keynote speaker then-President Ronald Reagan called a "solemn, profound, saddening, and yet triumphant occasion."

The \$60 million museum, honoring some six million Holocaust victims, will be the largest of its kind in the world. The facility, to be built entirely from private sources, will be chiefly an educational center that includes exhibit areas, archives, a library, a study center, two auditoriums, and a hexagonal Hall of Remembrance where candles may be lit to remember Holocaust victims. Possibly the most striking feature will be a Children's Wall comprised of six thousand ceramic tiles hand-painted by American schoolchildren and dedicated to the 1.5 million children who perished in Hitler's "Final Solution."

The Holocaust was a systematic extermination of Jews and other groups the Nazi regime and its collaborators deemed detrimental or inferior. Prior to this tragedy, annihilation of an entire people (as opposed to subjugation) was unprecedented in world history.

The Holocaust story as well as its aftermath, its impact on history, and the achievements of its survivors, will be told through oral histories, written narratives, letters, diaries, photographs, and keepsakes.

Planners hope that by preserving the memory of one of the darkest episodes in modern history, such a crime will never again be allowed to occur. "To forget," said Holocaust Memorial Council founding chairman, author, and Nobel Peace Laureate Elie Wiesel, "means to side with the killers . . . to offer

them a posthumous victory."

Described by planners as "purposefully disquieting" and "chillingly stark," the museum has been in the planning stages since 1980. A 1991 opening is expected. For more information write the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, 2000 L Street, N.W., Suite 588, Washington, D.C. 20036 or telephone 202-653-9219.

## **Gene Autry Museum Opens**

Famed Western star Gene Autry has realized a lifelong dream with the November 1988 opening of his Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum in Los Angeles, a \$54 million nonprofit institution established to collect, preserve, and interpret America's Western heritage.

Museum offerings include special exhibitions of private collections (such as Gerald P. Peters's comprehensive "The West Explored" collection, the museum's premiere show) as well as artifacts relating to the the museum's primary focus: the real, everyday lives and occupations of Western settlers, as expressed through their firearms, tools, conveyances, equipment, clothing, toys and games, and furnishings. Major artists such as Frederic Remington and Charles M. Russell will also be represented.

Features include two galleries for changing exhibits and five theme galleries—many with interactive design incorporating film, audio and video, and special effects—plus a theater, educational center, research library, cafe, and museum sales shop.

The museum, in Griffith Park next to the Los Angeles Zoo, is open daily except Mondays and major holidays from 10 A.M. to 5 P.M. Admission is \$4.75 for adults; \$3.50 for senior citizens, military members, and students; and \$2.00 for children through age twelve. For more information write to the museum director at 4700 Zoo Drive, Los Angeles, California 90027 or telephone 213-667-2000.★



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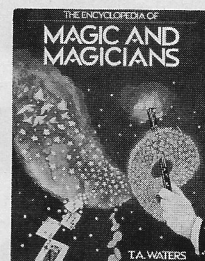
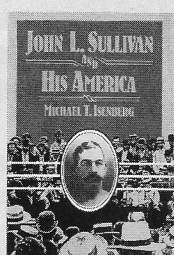
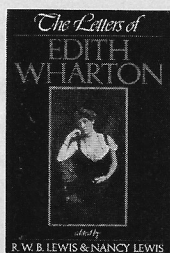
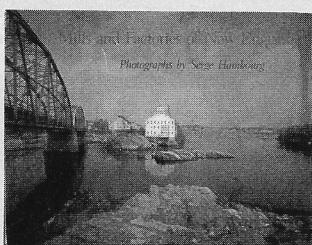
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# History Bookshelf



**American Dreamers: Charmian and Jack London** by Clarice Stasz (*St. Martin's Press, New York City, 1988; 362 pages, illustrated, \$22.95*).

Avant-garde author (*The Call of the Wild*) and socialist, Jack London shocked Victorian society in 1903 by leaving his wife and two daughters to marry the nonconventional Charmian Kitteridge, five years his senior, who became his soul-mate and work partner. This revisionist volume, largely based on research in Charmian's personal journals, emphasizes her contributions to London's life and writings as his editor, transcriber, devoted confidante, and model for many of the female characters in his stories.

**Recollections of a Life** by Alger Hiss (*Seaver Books and Henry Holt and Company, Inc., New York City, 1988; 229 pages, illustrated, \$19.95*).

Forty years ago Alger Hiss was an ascending star in American politics and government. Then Whittaker Chambers, a man Hiss knew a dozen years earlier under a different name, accused him before the House Committee on Un-American Activities of being a Communist and a spy. Convicted of perjury, Hiss was sent to prison for nearly four years. In this memoir Hiss recalls eight eventful decades and recounts his side of the case that polarized America as it destroyed his career. Provocative portraits of Richard Nixon and J. Edgar Hoover are included.

**Mills and Factories of New England** by Noel Perrin and Kenneth Breisch, with photographs by Serge Hambourg (*Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York City, for the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College, 1988; 108 pages, illustrated, \$29.95*).

Time seems to have stood still in these ninety color photographs portraying historic industrial structures that once helped to make New England the industrial heart of the nation. Two accompanying essays recount the history of New England factory construction and explore the place of the mill in the landscape.

**The Letters of Edith Wharton** edited by R.W.B. Lewis and Nancy Lewis (*Charles Scribner's Sons, New York City, 1988; 636 pages, illustrated, \$29.95*).

In his 1975 Pulitzer-Prize-winning biography of author Edith Wharton (1862-1937), R. W. B. Lewis revealed a woman whose vulnerabilities and passions the public rarely saw. The vividly emotional side of Wharton shone most brilliantly in the thousands of letters she wrote to her lover, friends, and associates. Nearly four hundred such letters, ranging from one written when she was twelve to another penned days before her death, appear in this collection. The end result is a lucid portrait of Wharton and her times.

**John L. Sullivan and His America** by Michael T. Isenberg (*University of Illinois Press, Chicago and Urbana, 1988; 465 pages, \$24.95*).

When "John L." Sullivan burst onto the New York underworld scene in 1881 as a prize fighter, boxing was against the law virtually everywhere in America. Over the next decade Sullivan became a national celebrity who helped change his pugilistic trade from an illicit, clandestine activity into a profitable and, eventually, legitimate business. Isenberg recounts how Sullivan fought his way out of an Irish ghetto in Boston to become world heavyweight champion, and he ex-

amines the fighter's bouts not only with the likes of Paddy Ryan and James J. Corbett, but with alcohol, bankruptcy, and promiscuity. A colorful portrait of Gilded Age America is incorporated into this sports history-biography.

**The Encyclopedia of Magic and Magicians** by T.A. Waters (*Facts on File Publications, New York City, 1988; 372 pages, illustrated, \$35.00*).

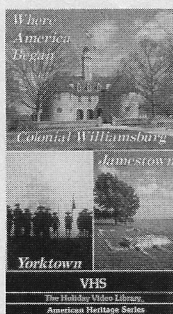
Illusions such as pulling a rabbit out of a hat and sawing a woman in half are among the more than one thousand entertaining and informative entries that comprise this comprehensive historical and reference volume. Written by magician T.A. Waters, a leading mind-reading authority, the encyclopedia includes biographies of both renowned and lesser-known magicians; descriptions of magical effects such as spirit cabinets and card tricks; and definitions of special effects—what they are and who performed them.

**Dictionary of the Vietnam War** edited by James S. Olson (*Greenwood Press, Inc., Westport, Connecticut, 1988; 603 pages, \$65.00*).

This reference work contains more than nine hundred entries, from "Agent Orange" to "Zippo War," defining and describing the people, military operations and equipment, politics, and controversies relating to the Vietnam conflict. Each entry includes sources for further research. Five appendices provide statistical information on the Vietnamese population; a glossary of Vietnam War slang; maps; a selected bibliography of the war; and a chronology of Vietnam events from 1945 to 1975. More than two dozen scholars contributed to this useful volume. ★



## Sight & Sound



**The Explorers: A Century of Discovery** (National Geographic and Vestron Video, P.O. Box 4000, Stamford, Connecticut 06907, 203-967-9200; VHS or Beta, 90 minutes, \$29.98).

The National Geographic Society, in commemoration of its one hundredth anniversary and in association with KQED Pittsburgh, has produced an epic film celebrating a century of scientific exploration. In as grand a scale as the Society's 1986 *Secrets of the Titanic*, this production, incorporating rare archival footage and new material, chronicles historic National Geographic discoveries and expeditions. Early in the Society's history its second president, Alexander Graham Bell, prophetically suggested the vast range of frontiers his organization would explore, noting that "the world and all that is in it is our theme." Viewers of this film can watch Bell demonstrate his revolutionary invention, the telephone; ascend Mount Everest with the first Americans to scale the world's highest peak; march toward the North Pole with Robert E. Peary; unearth Machu Picchu, Peru's lost Inca city; fly with Richard E. Byrd to the South Pole; wander through Alaska's Valley of 10,000 Smokes; and excavate a 4,500-year-old Egyptian boat.

**War Comes to America: The Front at Home** (MPI Home Video, 15825 Robroy Drive, Oak Forest, Illinois 60452, 312-687-7881; VHS or Beta, 67 minutes, \$19.95).

Seventh and final film in the "Why We Fight" series, this segment, directed by Frank Capra, provides an overview of American history from 1607 Jamestown through the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941,

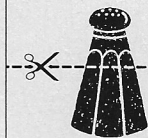
emphasizing the events that forced Americans to fight "for an idea bigger than their country"—freedom. Period art and re-enactments trace the course of westward expansion, increasing technology, and the path to war in the twentieth century. Capra's own philosophy and idealism colors the film with the patriotic message that while Americans don't want war, they'll fight to the death for freedom.

**Where America Began: Jamestown, Colonial Williamsburg, and Yorktown** (Finley-Holiday Film Corporation, Box 619, Whittier, California 90601, 213-945-3325; VHS or Beta, 60 minutes, \$29.95).

This video tour of three of the most significant historic sites associated with America's colonial history transports viewers to seventeenth-century Virginia. Included is a substantial history lesson through historical paintings, re-enactments, and restoration footage. Jamestown, the first permanent American settlement, features a visitor's center with exhibits and living history demonstrations such as colonial crafts and trades. When the budding colonies' capital was moved to Williamsburg in 1698, Jamestown's prosperity declined; now only foundation fragments remain. Over the years Colonial Williamsburg has been meticulously restored and is a popular tourist attraction; visitors can experience a long-vanished era as they walk through its houses, shops, and cobblestone streets. Yorktown, the site of Burgoyne's 1781 surrender that spelled victory for the new nation, is also a popular site. Period music enhances the high-quality American Heritage Series film. ★

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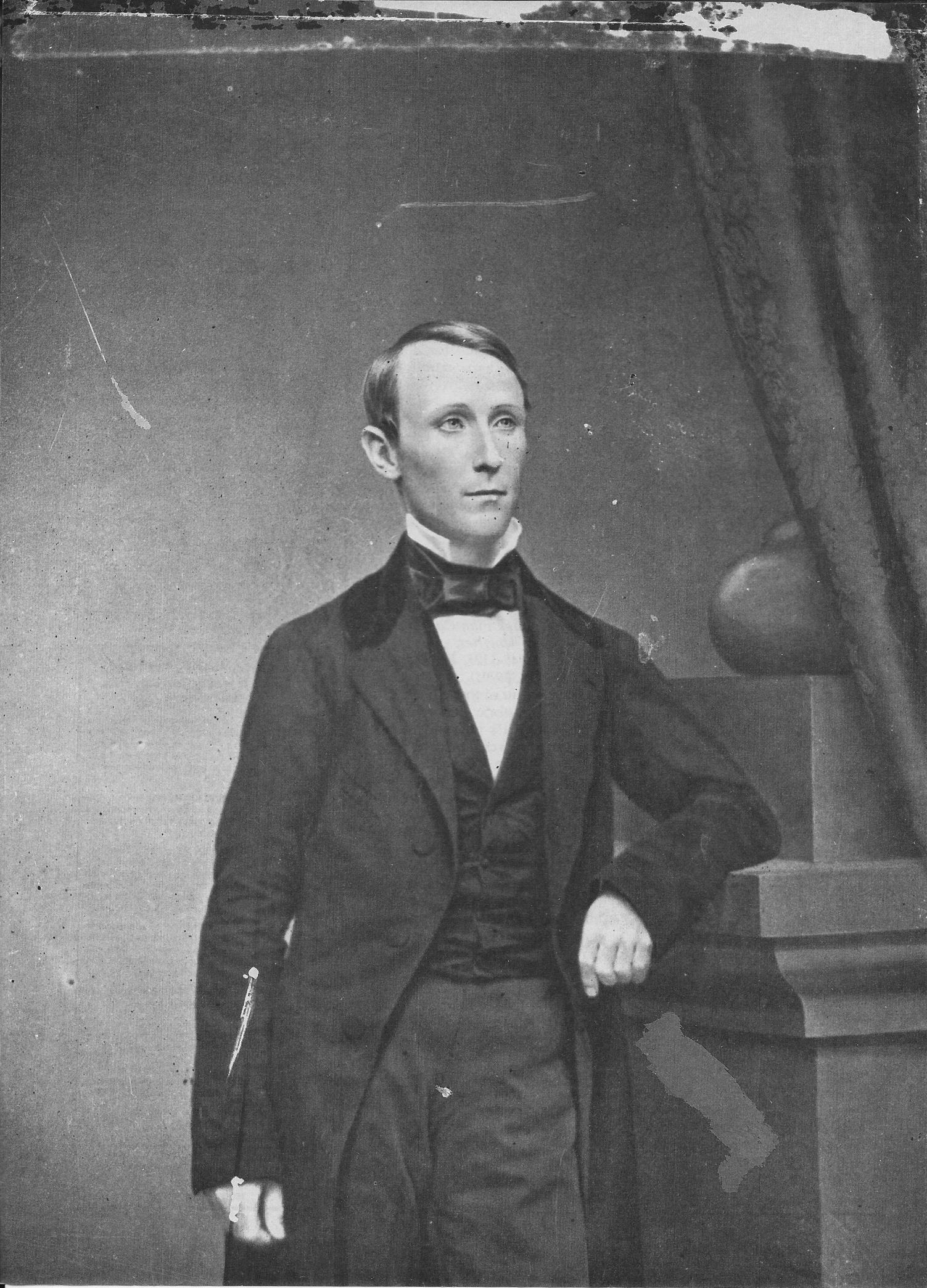
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# El Presidente Gringo

## William Walker and the Conquest of Nicaragua

by Roger Bruns and Bryan Kennedy

**H**IS EYES—there was something about his eyes. They were gray, languid yet penetrating, the color seeming to spill out from a cavernous depth. William Walker had heard the ancient legend told by Central American Indians of a “Gray-eyed Man of Destiny,” a savior who would bring peace and plentitude, a liberator whose coming they would hail and before whom they would lay offerings of fruit. Walker believed that he was that messiah, that man of destiny. “I am not ashamed to say,” he declared, “that I am favored by the gods.”

This preordination, Walker believed, was inextricably linked to America's destiny, its “manifest destiny,” the inevitable hemispheric triumph of the “pure American race.” The world's history, he said, was replete with examples of superior races overwhelming the inferior, of the drumbeat of human progress toward perfection, of the natural struggle between barbarism and civilization, of the clash of ancient, moldering cultures against the fresh breezes of enlightenment. That conviction would drive Walker south to Mexico, later to Central America. He saw himself as conqueror and prophet, an American Caesar.

Walker. To his enemies, the name conjured up no images of American destiny, no notions of progress and enlightenment. Rather it spoke of terrorism and invasion, of marauding bandits burning and killing, of towns overrun, of peoples humiliated and conquered.

In the small town of San Jacinto, Nicaragua stands a statue of a boy soldier who had slain one of Walker's invaders with a stone. The boy is still revered in Nicaragua, where he remains a symbol of resistance to foreign aggression. For Nicaragua, Walker is the devil never exorcised. His legacy lives on.



HE LOOKED an unlikely adventurer, an improbable conqueror. Barely more than 120 pounds, five-foot-five, with wispy blond hair, Walker was unimposing in stature, had a shrill, quavering voice, and often wore odd, ludicrously ill-matched clothing. But his innocuous appearance masked an intense, almost pathologically restless nature. Walker was seemingly always on a quest for excitement, violence, action. A driven romantic, hopelessly eccentric, he above all craved fame and recognition.

The usual image, the one that has grown with the legend, depicts a stern, rifle-carrying figure dressed in an over-large black parson's cape and broad, flat-brimmed black hat: a humorless, self-absorbed, puritanical, almost prudish zealot, impervious to danger, with a mind leaping and vaulting from apparent madness to brilliance.

He was born in 1824, the eldest son of a Scotch-born Nashville dry-goods merchant who had made a fortune in the insurance business. Walker's devout parents, members of the Disciples of Christ, a fundamentalist sect, encouraged William to prepare for the ministry, but he decided instead to study medicine. An academic prodigy, Walker graduated from the University of Nashville at age fourteen, then went north to the University of Pennsylvania where, at age nineteen, he obtained a medical degree.

Walker traveled to Europe for postgraduate work, becoming a proponent of the pain-relieving powers of hypnotic surgery. But disgusted by the wretched, ill-equipped hospitals of the early nineteenth century, and troubled by his inability to cure his mother's acute rheumatism, he gradually drifted away from medicine to the study of law. His penetrating, rapacious intellect mastered this new field as swiftly as it had the first. He was admitted to the bar in New Orleans and practiced briefly.

But Walker's restlessness soon drove him to yet another profession—journalism. In 1848 he became an editorial writer for the *New Orleans Crescent*. While working there, he fell in love with a deaf and mute woman named Ellen Martin.

When Martin contracted cholera and suddenly died, Walker was devastated. He escaped to San Francisco, taking a job with one of the city's newest papers, the *Daily Herald*.

Journalism ignited Walker's intellectual fires. He was stirred by the contentious debate over slavery then raging across the country; mesmerized by tales of gold; by stories of adventurers and pioneers; of Indians and Mexican banditos; of duels and shoot-outs. The seemingly gentle, courteous, and chivalrous young writer stood ready to break the chains of convention. The path of destiny beckoned.

The call came from the south.

DURING the United States' war with Mexico in 1847, Commodore Matthew C. Perry had written to Secretary of the Navy John Mason: "Destiny has

doubtless decided that the vast continent of North America . . . shall in the course of time fall under the influence of Laws and institutions of the United States."

Perry's belief was hardly new. The idea that the United States would eventually annex the entire western hemisphere—from the Arctic snows to Cape Horn—had for years excited Americans, especially politicians and speculators. They shared an unbridled nationalism, the conviction that the moral and cultural superiority of the United States would gain for the country increasing dominance.

In this fever of expansionism, many Americans were drawn south to Latin America, with its rich lands and uncertain future. Torn by incessant wars, riddled by political intrigue and corruption, coveted by European colonial powers, the countries of Latin America tottered in confusion and instability. For reckless men on the run, for daring entrepreneurs, for adventurers of all types, the region was alluring. It was especially so for those imaginative if presumptuous freebooters known as "filibusters"—men who by force of arms sought to seize countries and establish themselves as rulers.

The idea was simple enough. Gather together the best available soldiers of fortune, equip them with weapons and supplies, rent a ship or two, sail to a Latin American country, usurp power, and become a dictator, president, king, or whatever title of government or royalty one chose. Fame and riches awaited the man bold enough, ingenious enough, to succeed.

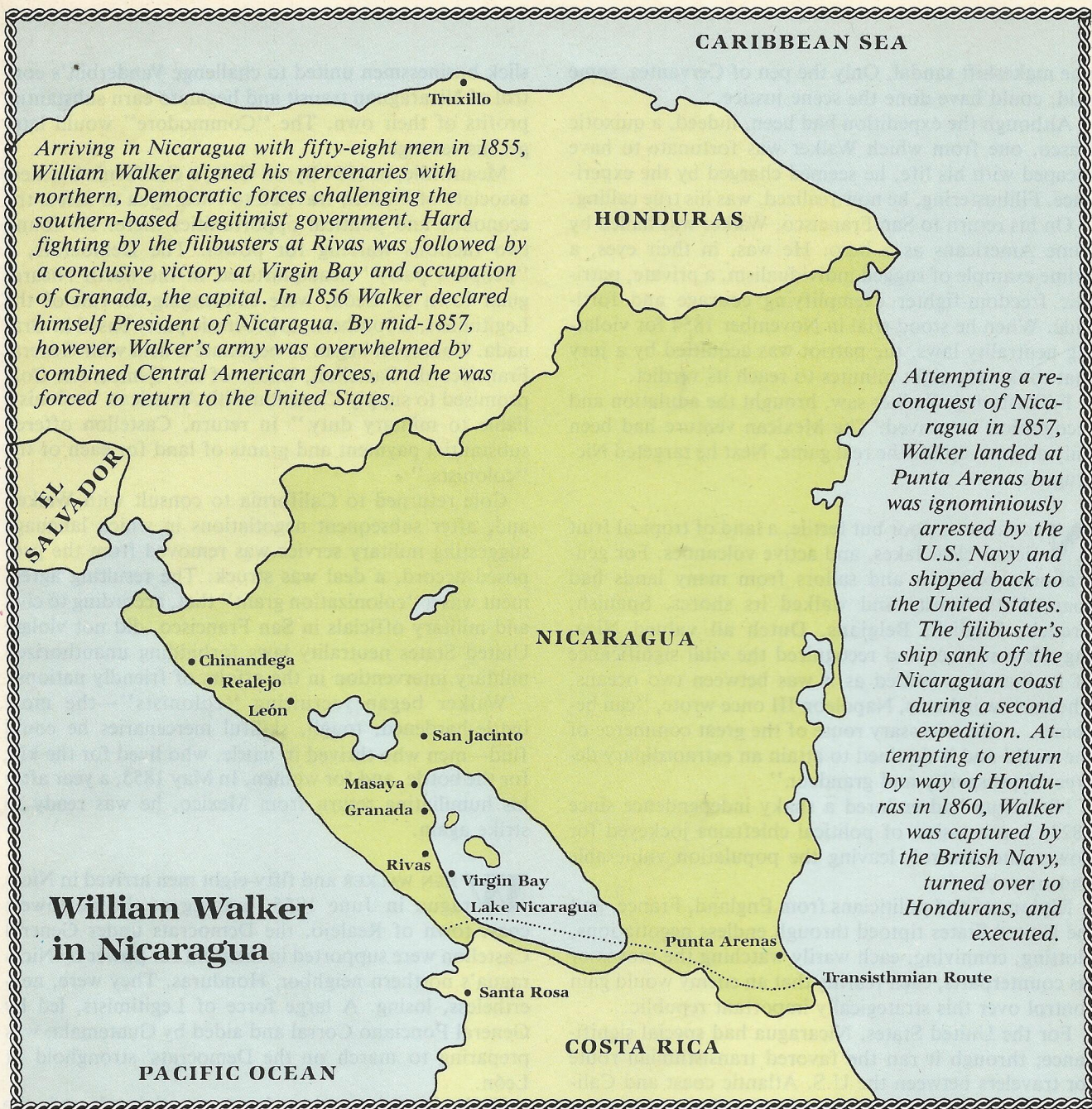
Walker had heard of several such expeditions—and of the ignominious embarrassment and defeat of most. But these forays, Walker thought, had not been led by men of *his* caliber. Driven by wanderlust, embittered by his beloved's death, Walker was about to enter a world of club and iron, a world of short odds. It would become his obsession.

WALKER THE FILIBUSTER. In 1853 he recruited a force of about forty-five men, set sail for Lower California, and launched his career as a conqueror. His mission, he announced, was humanitarian: to protect American women and children living along the Mexican border from attacks by Apache Indians. He was acting, he said, to overcome oppression and bring the blessings of American civilization to these benighted Mexican provinces, to introduce democracy and stability to a troubled land.

From the early days of the excursion, Walker displayed the grandiloquent, pompous air that would mark his entire career. After his troops managed to capture La Paz, the small, sleepy capital of Baja California, Walker boldly issued a proclamation establishing the "Republic of Lower California." The new government came equipped with a flag designed by Walker, a constitution written by Walker, and a cabinet chosen by Walker from the ranks of his army of adventurers. Walker, of course, was President.

Word of his initial success attracted new recruits from





California. Next, Walker's army moved eastward over rugged mountains and across the Colorado River to Sonora. When Walker announced the addition of this neighboring state to his paper nation, a San Francisco editor noted that "It would have been just as cheap and easy to have annexed the whole of Mexico at once, and would have saved the trouble of making future proclamations."

As President, Walker adopted an aloof, burdened posture. Here was a head of state with weighty problems crushing down on him, a man totally absorbed by the affairs of government, carrying on admirably in the face of insurmountable odds.

But although he issued a stream of orders and demands, the rigorous discipline Walker had sought to instill in his men began to slip out of his grasp. In a brazen

effort to control his forces, he ordered the execution of two of his troops who had tried to flee the foundering enterprise. Nevertheless, as conditions continued to deteriorate, desertions became rampant.

The adventure came to an abrupt end. Chased out of Lower California, Walker managed to lead a few surviving members of his party back across the United States border near San Diego on May 8, 1854—his thirtieth birthday.

Most of Walker's troops had perished in Mexico from fever, starvation, or enemy bullets. The survivors had run out of provisions en route and barely escaped eradication by Mexican soldiers and Indians. They had marched nearly barefoot for hundreds of miles, leaving a trail of blood on the sun-baked desert sand. Walker himself limped across the border wearing one boot and



one makeshift sandal. Only the pen of Cervantes, some said, could have done the scene justice.

Although the expedition had been, indeed, a quixotic fiasco, one from which Walker was fortunate to have escaped with his life, he seemed charged by the experience. Filibustering, he now realized, was his true calling.

On his return to San Francisco, Walker was hailed by some Americans as a hero. He was, in their eyes, a prime example of rugged individualism, a private, patriotic freedom-fighter exemplifying courage and fortitude. When he stood trial in November 1854 for violating neutrality laws, the patriot was acquitted by a jury that took only eight minutes to reach its verdict.

Filibustering, Walker saw, brought the adulation and recognition he craved. The Mexican venture had been only a warm-up for the real game. Next he targeted Nicaragua.

**N**ICARAGUA: poor but fertile, a land of tropical fruit fields, clear lakes, and active volcanoes. For generations, explorers and sailors from many lands had roamed its forests and walked its shores. Spanish, French, English, Belgians, Dutch all valued Nicaragua's resources and recognized the vital significance of its location, nestled as it was between two oceans. The narrow isthmus, Napoleon III once wrote, "can become . . . the necessary route of the great commerce of the world and is destined to attain an extraordinary degree of prosperity and grandeur."

Nicaragua had endured a shaky independence since 1823. A succession of political chieftains jockeyed for power and control, leaving the population vulnerable and unstable.

Diplomats and politicians from England, France, and the United States tiptoed through endless negotiations, plotting, conniving, each warily watching the moves of his counterparts, each fearing that an enemy would gain control over this strategically important republic.

For the United States, Nicaragua had special significance; through it ran the favored transisthmian route for travelers between the U.S. Atlantic coast and California. By treaty Nicaragua had granted Americans the right to establish transit. Now, by river boat, lake steamer, and carriage, travelers were able to cross from one ocean to the other without a long and dangerous passage around South America.

The transit route was the brainchild of one of America's wealthiest men: Cornelius Vanderbilt, the "Commodore," who had made a fortune running steamboats on the Hudson River. Vanderbilt's sagacious business instincts had been whetted by the prospective profits from Nicaraguan investment. Promising to fill Nicaraguan leaders' pockets with gold, he had negotiated a contract for his Accessory Transit Company in 1849. Two years later he opened his isthmian route and began to run steamers from both U.S. coasts to Nicaraguan ports. The Accessory Transit Company enlarged the Vanderbilt fortune.

But soon the "Commodore" had competition. Two

slick businessmen united to challenge Vanderbilt's control of Nicaraguan transit and began to earn substantial profits of their own. The "Commodore" would later get his revenge.

Meanwhile, in 1854 Byron Cole, a California business associate of Walker, traveled to Nicaragua to assess the economic and political opportunities there. He found two factions warring for power. The Democrats, a "people's party" headquartered in the north Nicaraguan town of León, were challenging the rule of the Legitimists, a Southern, aristocratic party based in Granada. Cole soon began to negotiate a deal with General Francisco de Castellon, leader of the Democrats. Cole promised to supply Castellon with American "colonists liable to military duty." In return, Castellon offered substantial payment and grants of land for each of the "colonists."

Cole returned to California to consult with Walker, and, after subsequent negotiations in which language suggesting military service was removed from the proposed accord, a deal was struck. The resulting agreement was a "colonization grant" that, according to civil and military officials in San Francisco, did not violate United States neutrality laws forbidding unauthorized military intervention in the affairs of friendly nations.

Walker began recruiting "colonists"—the most battle-hardened, tough, skillful mercenaries he could find—men who thrived in battle, who lived for the kill, for the bottle, and for women. In May 1855, a year after his humiliating return from Mexico, he was ready to strike again.

**W**HEN WALKER and fifty-eight men arrived in Nicaragua in June 1855, landing at the northwest coast town of Realejo, the Democrats under General Castellon were supported in their bid for power by Nicaragua's northern neighbor, Honduras. They were, nevertheless, losing. A large force of Legitimists, led by General Ponciano Corral and aided by Guatemala, was preparing to march on the Democrats' stronghold at León.

Walker's arrogance soon became a mighty force in the Nicaraguan war. To *El Filibustero*, the Democrats and General Castellon were hopeless as military tacticians—confused, bewildered, totally unable to carry on the war effort effectively. He began to ignore them. When one of the generals became offended by Walker's presumptuousness, the American threatened to leave Nicaragua. Castellon quickly promised to reinforce Walker's troops with two hundred native conscripts.

Viewing the situation, Walker quickly decided that waiting in the Democratic capital of León for the expected onslaught by the Legitimist troops would be a foolhardy, probably suicidal strategy. He decided, instead, to take the offensive.

"La Falange Americana" (the American Phalanx), as the Democrats called Walker's force, sailed south to the Pacific end of Vanderbilt's transit route and prepared to attack Rivas, a town near Lake Nicaragua supposedly





held by a small Legitimist force. If the Americans could control the transit route, Walker reasoned, then supplies, money, and weapons could be procured from the United States and recruits mustered from among the Transit Company's passengers.

On June 29, 1855 Walker slammed his forces into Rivas. He had his own fifty-eight soldiers of fortune and about 150 native Nicaraguans supplied by the Democrats. The conscripts soon began to disappear, however, either through treachery or cowardice. The American invaders were left to face a force about ten times their number.

But the odds were not as one-sided as they appeared. The American mercenaries carried Mississippi rifles and V.C. Colt revolvers, and they were all crack shots. The native Nicaraguans carried muskets that were notoriously inaccurate, even at close range.

After a bold attack, "La Falange" found itself surrounded in a building on the town's outskirts. There, Walker's troops exchanged gunfire with the enemy for several hours. Finally, running out of ammunition and seemingly doomed, Walker played his usual hand: he charged. His men rushed into the streets, rifles blazing, and soon more than one hundred dead and wounded Nicaraguans littered the area. "La Falange" escaped, leaving behind six dead. Walker, later musing on the success of his brash tactics, wrote that "the Legitimists were not much in the humor of pursuing those who had taught them a first lesson in the use of a rifle."

An 1856 issue of Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper depicts Walker and his filibusters after their attack on Rivas. "It is useless to say," noted Leslie's, "that men who had suffered so much, perilled so much, would feel that they were entitled to some latitude under their circumstances, and they indulged themselves to their heart's content. The day of revelry however, came to an end, and General Walker, himself never self-indulgent, called into being the stern discipline of military life, and restored to his army order; to the people he had delivered from tyranny, safety and peace."

José de Marcoleta, the Legitimist government's minister to the United States, complained bitterly to Secretary of State William Marcy of the devastation at Rivas: "The remains of buildings are still burning, and the ruins and ashes produced by the torch and hand of Walker are still smoking; the blood that has been shed is still warm; and years will elapse before the bitter tears will be dried which that brigand has caused to be shed by numberless families in both sections of the continent of America."

WALKER WITHDREW his force to Chinandega, a small town in northern Nicaragua, where he established his base of operations. Although his Democratic sponsors now wanted Walker to disperse his



American troops throughout the Democratic army, *El Filibustero* refused. His cadre of about fifty men would better serve, he reasoned, as the terrifying nucleus of an army that could overrun all of Nicaragua.

He drilled his small army hard, and soon it was again ready to take the offensive. The filibusters sailed south again in August, landing on the coast west of Virgin Bay, another town on the transit route. Walker now commanded about forty-five mercenaries and 120 Nicaraguans. They soon confronted the enemy. Six hundred Legitimist troops bore down, testing the flanks of the small Democratic force. The Americans fired methodically and with deadly accuracy. Of the Legitimists, Walker wrote: "When they got within thirty or forty yards of the Americans their hearts seemed to fail them . . . either the quantity of liquor was insufficient, or it may have been too great, or it began to die out before the soldiers got close to their adversaries."

At battle's end, sixty dead Legitimists carpeted the outskirts of Virgin Bay. Two Nicaraguan Democrats had been killed, and several Americans wounded. A ball struck Walker, but he survived relatively unscathed. No wonder the press in the United States now began to call Walker and his fighters the "Immortals."

Walker did not wreak a conqueror's wrath upon the vanquished; instead, he instructed his men to bind the enemy's wounds. To captives who had fully expected to be bayoneted, Walker's orders seemed godlike. But this was a man on a divine mission. Cruel retribution, he believed, would have been unseemly. Walker was above that kind of barbarism. With this victory at Virgin Bay, he had tasted glory. Nothing, he was convinced, now stood between his band and ultimate triumph.

At dawn on October 13, a transit steamer carrying Walker and his warriors anchored near the Legitimist capital of Granada. Soon the "Immortals" stormed the town, taking it with barely a shot fired. To many Nicaraguans, Walker now appeared invincible.

The victor issued a "Manifesto Addressed to Nicaraguans." To those who had expected rape and pillage from invading marauders, Walker offered order and tranquility. There would be no "unutterable immoralities" under a Walker regime, he promised, but protection to laboring men; a fostering of the arts, science, and agriculture; a government liberal in principle, committed to preserving peace and the vital interests of the nation. "Here it is," he declared, "a democratic Government in its true sense."

Although Walker had convincingly taken power in Granada, his victory still left a large number of Legitimist troops under General Corral holding much of Nicaragua. Walker's solution was a call for a coalition government composed of leaders from both parties.

Walker's willingness to seek a peaceful reconciliation astonished both sides. Impressed at such open compromise, many of Walker's bitterest enemies were grudgingly beginning to respect the *gringo* leader with the floppy hat. And when some Nicaraguans attempted to persuade Walker to accept the presidency of the country,

*A Central American view of Walker the "liberator": atop a monument in San José, Costa Rica, heroic figures representing five Central American republics drive out the embattled, disgraced filibuster.*

he declined the offer—an act that so impressed U.S. Minister to Nicaragua John Wheeler that he began to work in Walker's behalf without even asking for the U.S. State Department's consent.

Working long hours, Walker started a state newspaper called *El Nicaragüense*, designed a state seal, created a flag, and began organizing a new government. He was not yet *El Presidente*, but it seemed that anything in Nicaragua was his for the taking.

**W**ALKER'S JUDICIOUS MANEUVERING took one perilous turn during these months. Vanderbilt's transit company, Walker perceived, was accruing large profits without turning any of it to the benefit of Nicaragua. Aligning himself with Vanderbilt's business rivals because of their association with his long-time friend Edmund Randolph, Walker revoked the charter of the Accessory Transit Company, a move both bold and ominous. Responding to this audacious move, the "Commodore" made plans to send guns and money to oust from Nicaragua the impudent invader.

As leaders of neighboring Central American countries became increasingly alarmed at Walker's success, U.S. Secretary of State William Marcy assured diplomats that his country had not officially recognized the Walker government. But Marcy's disclaimer did not ring true with leaders in Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. They suspected the U.S. government of engineering a covert operation, of launching a subversive move to take over Central America.

By December 1855, two months after the fall of Granada, Central American opposition to filibuster control began to coalesce. Walker's success in Nicaragua had, ironically, promoted Central American nationalism. Leaders of the various countries began to work together toward one common goal—to crush the *gringo* usurper.

Costa Rica was the first to act. On March 1, 1856, Costa Rican President Juan Rafael Mora declared war on the Yankees. When word reached Walker, he decided on a pre-emptive raid into Costa Rica. But the force of about two hundred men he sent across the border to the town of Santa Rosa was quickly routed.

Although Walker was sick with fever, he rallied his demoralized forces and attacked the town of Rivas, where the advancing Costa Rican forces had taken temporary residence. The "Immortals" fought a long, house-to-house brawl and then were forced to withdraw with more than one hundred casualties.

But again Walker survived. Cholera and antiwar sentiment on the home front forced the Costa Ricans to withdraw, and a feared invasion from Honduras never materialized. For his humane treatment of Costa Rican

*Continued on page 46*







# George Washington's False Teeth

by Joseph Gustaitis

*"Straight as an Indian, measuring six feet two inches in his stockings and weighing 175 pounds. His frame is padded with well-developed muscles, indicating great strength. . . . His mouth is large and generally firmly closed, but which from time to time discloses some defective teeth."*

**S**UCH WAS British army officer George Mercer's description of a fellow soldier—George Washington—in 1758. Washington was then only twenty-six years old, but he was already experiencing the problems that would make him America's most famous denture wearer.

In later years, as a leading military and public figure, Washington tried to keep his oral grief a secret, telling his staff that it should "not be made a parade of"; and he once disguised his dental invoice as a hat bill. But the hero of Valley Forge, the steady hand at the new nation's helm, stoically suffered through most of his life from some of the most discomforting of mankind's afflictions—toothaches, periodontal disease, and ill-fitting dentures.

Washington first lost a tooth at age twenty-two, and by the time he became President in 1789 he retained only one natural tooth—a lower left bicuspid. He consequently cultivated a taste for pickled tripe, an easy-to-chew food. "Dental infirmity," he wrote, "impels me caring for this necessary item in our domestic commissariat."

Among the many myths that circulate about the first President is the notion that he wore wooden dentures. This story may have originated because his set of ivory dentures,\* made for him by dentist John Greenwood, was easily stained by port, coffee, tobacco, and tea, giving the teeth a wooden look. In 1797—long before the days of Polydent—Washington complained to Greenwood that his dentures were becoming stained. Upon returning the teeth to Washington, Greenwood told him the discoloration was "occasioned either by your soaking them in port-wine, or drinking it. Port, being sour, takes off all the polish. . . . I advise you either to take them out after drinks and put them in clear water and put in another set, or to clean them with a brush and some chalk finely scraped."

The nation's first President also had a set of den-

*\*Porcelain dentures were not introduced to the United States until 1817, almost two decades after Washington's death.*

tures made by artist Charles Willson Peale, who painted the earliest known portrait of Washington. Peale had begun making false teeth because he needed them himself. A set of dentures he fashioned for Washington in the 1790s is now preserved (but not displayed) at Mount Vernon. The lower teeth are elephant and human teeth; the uppers are apparently from dairy cattle. The false teeth are set in a lead base, and the plates are connected by steel springs.

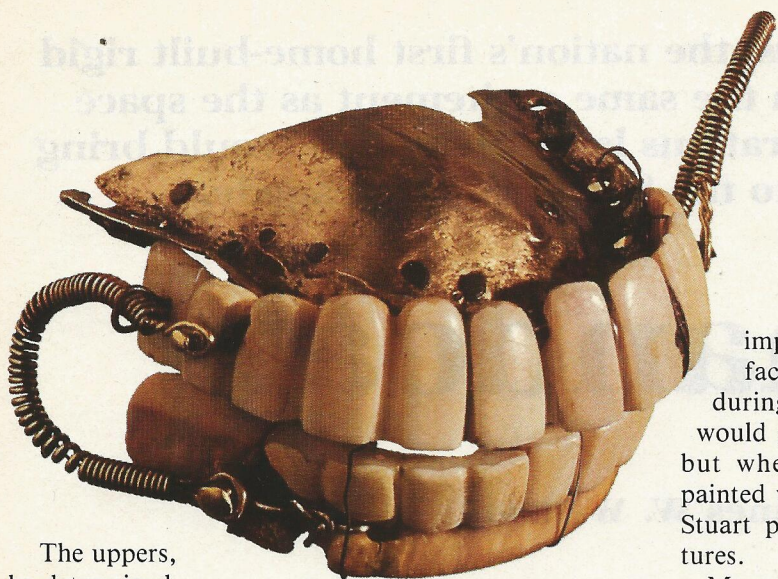
A portrait of Washington that Peale painted when the Continental Army leader was forty-seven years old bears a mark further indicating Washington's oral health problems. In the painting, Washington's cheek is scarred because of a fistula resulting from an abscessed tooth.

**U**SE OF artificial teeth has been traced back to the Etruscans of the fourth century B.C. The practice declined after the fall of Rome, but was maintained by the Arabs and revived during the Renaissance in Europe, where false teeth devised in the fifteenth century still exist. The French became leaders in the art. Two French dentists, Joseph LeMayeur and James Gardette, demonstrated their skill to the American colonial army; one of their students was Greenwood.

Greenwood—one of four brothers who were all dentists—set up shop in New York around 1786, calling himself a "real maker of artificial teeth." He pioneered use of the foot drill in dentistry and had a good understanding of the causes of tooth decay and gum disease. He advocated regular teeth-cleaning, and, although mistaken in believing that tartar was a by-product of the breath, correctly recommended its removal. He and Washington corresponded, and after Washington mentioned in a letter that "I shall always prefer your services to those of any other in the line of your present profession," Greenwood inserted the endorsement into his advertisements.

The set of teeth pictured here is a reproduction of the original made by Greenwood, and is on display at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. The actual dentures were stolen from the museum in 1981, presumably for the gold from which the palate plate was made. Fortunately, Dr. Reidar Soggnaes, a dental professor and expert on Washington's teeth, had copied the original set a few years before and was able to replace the purloined dentures with his replica.





The uppers, he determined, were carved from “two cross-sections of a good-sized canine tooth from the upper jaw of a hippopotamus.” These were attached to the gold palate plate with braces, whose sharp edges, Soggnaes says, “must have caused considerable discomfort to Washington’s tongue and palate.” The lowers are made from both hippopotamus and elephant teeth and are fastened to the base by tiny wooden pegs. Gold springs hold the plates together. Washington disliked this set and sent it back for adjustment, complaining that the protruding incisors made his lips bulge.

In addition to these complete sets, two fragments of other dentures worn by Washington also exist. One, in the New York Academy of Medicine, is a crude set of lower teeth that Greenwood carved from ivory. This half-section has a hole in it to accommodate the one tooth Washington still had when the dentures were made. The other fragment, now in the Medical College Museum at the University of London, is the right half of a set of lowers made from walrus tusk.

Two of Washington’s real teeth have also been preserved; these help reveal why the general suffered tooth loss. After examining both, Soggnaes found the teeth in essentially good shape, and has therefore concluded that periodontal disease and bone loss, not decay, caused most of Washington’s dental problems.

Oral health problems obviously did not impede Washington’s glorious career, but they did have their effect on the man, as can be seen in the famous portraits by Gilbert Stuart, especially the full-length version painted in 1796, now in the White House. In this picture the President’s mouth is unusually distorted, so much so that the portrait has been called “the hero with the ill-fitting teeth.” Washington biographer James Thomas Flexner has theorized that Stuart, frustrated by his inability to warm up his dour subject, may have exaggerated Washington’s dental defects as a subtle form of revenge.

For another portrait painted in 1796, Stuart tried to

improve the appearance of Washington’s sunken face by padding his lips and cheeks with cotton during the sittings. Stuart hoped this technique would give his subject a more natural appearance, but when compared to portraits of Washington painted when he still had most of his teeth, the 1796 Stuart painting shows noticeably altered facial features.

Many contemporaries who knew Washington in his later years remarked on his reserve. This apparent reticence may in fact have been simple reluctance to open his mouth. Once, for example, after a period of severe gum inflammation, Washington gave a large dinner party; among the guests was Senator William Maclay, who noted that “The President seemed to bear in his countenance a settled aspect of melancholy. No cheering ray of sunshine broke through the cloudy gloom of settled seriousness. At every interval of eating and drinking he played on the table with a fork or a knife, like the drumstick.”

Soggnaes maintains that Washington probably wasn’t able to laugh very much because of his dental problems. He adds that Washington would have had trouble pronouncing “s” words and may have talked with his teeth closed, “as if he, of all people, were lying through his teeth.”

Washington’s dental troubles probably contributed to his indigestion, perhaps even to his later deafness, which could have resulted from the unnatural movements of his lower jaw. There is no doubt he endured great pain.

But then, Washington was not alone. Tooth loss was common in the eighteenth century. Restorative and preventive dentistry were primitive by today’s standards, and extraction, by means of grim-looking instruments, was the rule. Physicians as well as dentists performed this procedure, and Washington once had his doctor, James Craik, pull out a sore tooth.

In 1798 Washington wrote to a dentist named Benjamin Fendall, complaining that dentures he had ordered were late in arriving. Fendall responded, “Within this Day, or two, I found myself . . . as to be enabled to finish Mrs. Washington’s teeth, and you’ll receive them, safe, I hope, by my Servant.”

Yes, Martha wore false teeth, too. ★

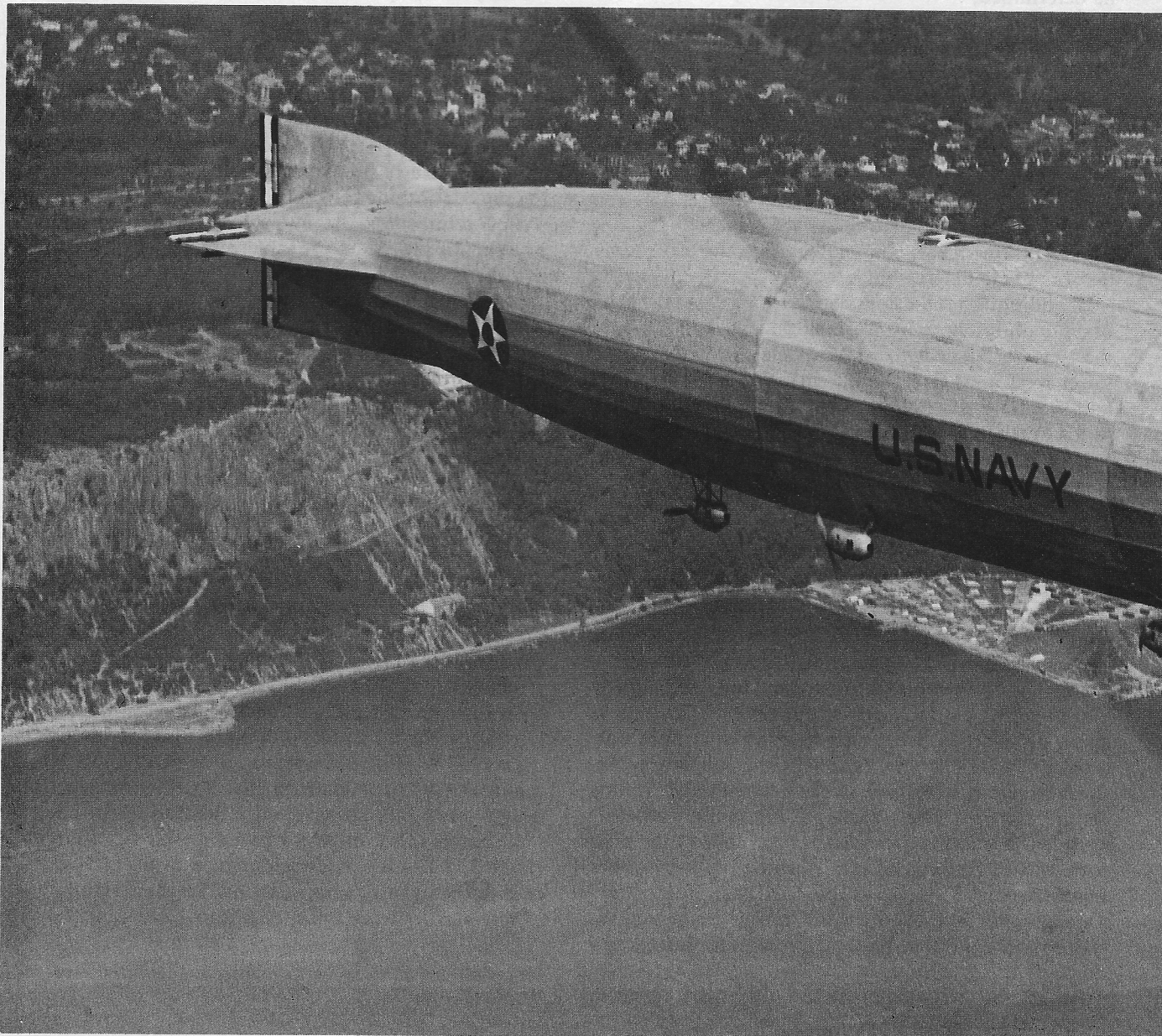
*Emmy-Award-winning writer Joseph Gustaitis lives in Brooklyn, New York.*



To Americans of the 1920s, the nation's first home-built rigid airship generated much the same excitement as the space shuttle would three generations later. Her crash would bring aftershocks akin to the "Challenger" tragedy.

# Shenandoah

by James W. Wensyel





**L**ABOR DAY, September 3, 1925. In the early morning calm, a strange droning in the dark sky above Wheeling, West Virginia caught the attention of a young railroad brakeman walking home from work.

For a moment he puzzled over its source. Then he saw a huge dirigible, headed almost due west, gliding swiftly over the sleeping town.

Cruising at an altitude of 2,500 feet, her five engines humming softly in the calm air, the dirigible was beautiful. White running lights marked her fore and aft, while green and red lights on the engine gondo-

las outlined her port and starboard sides. Through the thin silver fabric covering her huge frame, the brakeman saw small, twinkling white lights—the flashlights of crewmen walking the catwalk of her keel.

He recognized her as the *Shenandoah*, America's first large rigid airship and the pride of the U.S. Navy, on a well-publicized flight from her base at Lakehurst, New Jersey to the Midwest.

The railroad worker watched as the leviathan crossed over the Ohio River and then disappeared into the night sky above the rugged eastern Ohio hills. She was so beautiful,

so serene, so sure in her flight—a sight he'd never forget. The brakeman quickened his pace toward home. He chose not to awaken his family, but looked forward to the morning's pleasure of telling them he had seen the *Shenandoah*.

The brakeman had no way of knowing that by the time he awakened to tell them about his airship sighting, the *Shenandoah* would lie, twisted and torn in several scattered pieces, not thirty miles away; nor that fourteen of the crew—some of whose flashlights he had seen in that magical moment—would lie dead in and near the wreckage.





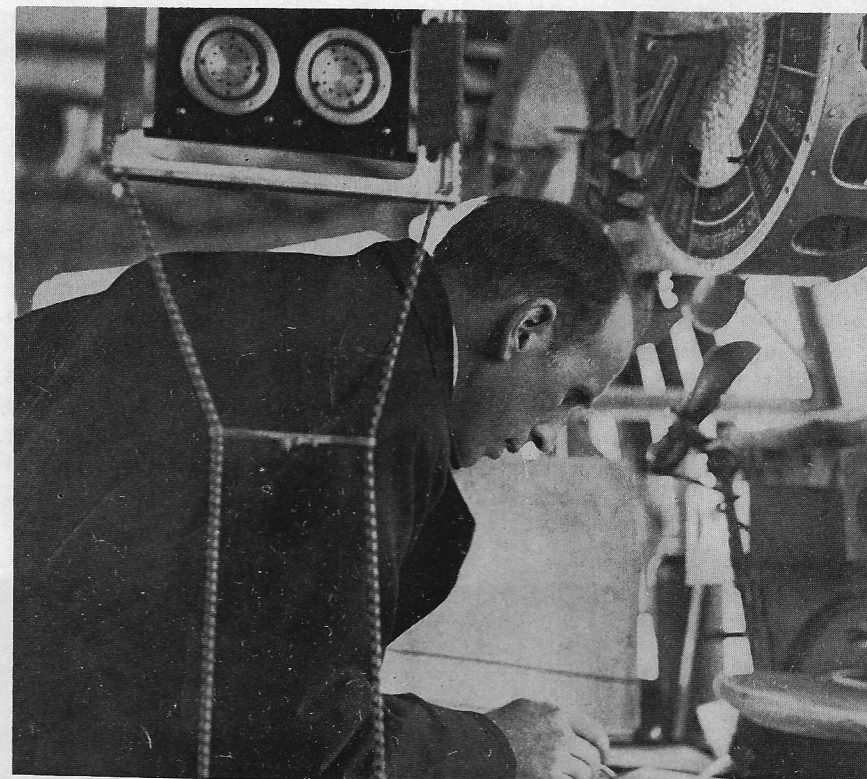
*Lieutenant Commander Zachary Lansdowne, seen here in the control car of the Shenandoah, assumed command of the Navy dirigible in May 1924. Lansdowne was regarded as the best airship officer in the Navy.*

FOR NEARLY A DECADE Americans had been fascinated by dirigibles, giant ships of the sky. The enchantment was born among military airmen. German zeppelins, the rigid airships whose World War I bombing raids on London and Paris brought war almost as close to the civilian populace as to the soldiers in the trenches, were viewed as aeronautical marvels. Reports of the bombing raids alerted Americans an ocean away to the potential power of military aviation.

On January 15, 1917, Congress established a Joint Airship Board, comprised of Army and Navy officers charged with determining the role of rigid airships in the fledgling air services. The Board recommended in July 1918 that the U.S. Navy take charge of a program to develop the airship as a naval reconnaissance vehicle. It further recommended that four rigid airships be obtained at once: two to be purchased in England for use in the war zone and two to be built in the United States; and that an airship base be established in America.

The Armistice delayed implementation of the program, but in 1919 Congress appropriated funds for two airships, both meant for the Navy. One, the ZR-1 (later named the *Shenandoah*), would be built in the United States so that Americans might learn rigid airship technology. The other, the ZR-2, would be built in England.

Designated the R-38 by her British builders, the \$2 million ZR-2 proved structurally defective. During her final test flight, on August 21, 1921, the airship broke in two and crashed and burned in England's Humber River. Sixteen of the seventeen



American naval aviators on board, along with most of the British crew, died in the wreck.

This tragic loss led to a subsequent order with a German firm to build the ZR-3, subsequently named the *Los Angeles*.

Construction of the *Shenandoah*, the first large rigid airship built in the United States, began in 1920. Her parts were fabricated at the Naval Aircraft Factory in Philadelphia, then trucked thirty miles to the Lakehurst Naval Air Station, a former Army post in New Jersey, where they were assembled in an enormous hangar built especially for the American airships. The design for the \$3 million dirigible was based on that of the L-49, a German zeppelin captured intact after being forced down in France in 1917.

The *Shenandoah's* hull measured 682 feet in length and had a maximum diameter of nearly eighty feet. Its framework consisted of 2,700 girders of duralumin, an extremely lightweight but strong alloy of copper and aluminum, braced and supported by a network of thousands of wires. Her skin was cotton cloth—enough to cover two football fields—painted with silver aluminum dope.

A keel forming the airship's backbone ran along the bottom of the hull from nose to tail. This framework, triangular in cross-section, measured nine feet high by twelve feet wide amidships and narrowed at the ends. Nests of metal gasoline tanks and a number of large rubber bags for water ballast hung at intervals along the keel. Two twelve-foot-square plywood platforms supported work and storage areas, crew lounges, and a small galley. A nine-inch-wide catwalk along the base of the keel provided access to the hull. In flight, only the airship's fragile cotton skin, sweeping a few inches below the keel, separated crewmen negotiating the narrow walkway from the vast gulf below.

Unlike European dirigibles, which employed highly flammable hydrogen to provide lift, the *Shenandoah* used helium. This non-flammable gas, extracted from petroleum, was available in quantity only in the United States. More than two million cubic feet of the gas (valued at a quarter of a million dollars) filled twenty gas cells within the airship's hull.

The individual gas cells were made of "goldbeater's skin" (cattle intestines, then the least porous ma-



terial available) glued to high-strength varnished cotton cloth. Tethered to the keel by cord mesh nettings, each cell was free to expand or contract within the hull in response to variations in temperature and the airship's altitude.

Power to drive the *Shenandoah* came from six 300-horsepower Packard engines in cars suspended below the hull by struts and bracing wires. To reach the engine cars, crewmen scampered precariously down ladders open to the sky.

The airship was commanded and controlled from a single navigating car—also hanging by struts and wires—about twenty feet below the forward portion of the hull. Cables from rudder and elevator wheels in the control car ran along the keel to vertical and horizontal fins in the tail.

Without her buoying cargo of helium, the dirigible weighed forty tons. Fuel, ballast, provisions, and crew added more than fifteen additional tons, yet so delicate was the *Shenandoah's* balance that a single man, walking the length of her keel, could change the angle of flight by three degrees. When the airship's captain wanted sudden changes in elevation, he customarily ordered crewmen to scamper fore and aft as needed. The crew called the procedure "galloping kilos."

**T**HE SHENANDOAH took to the air for her first test flight on September 4, 1923. Lieutenant Commander Charles E. Rosendahl, navigator of the *Shenandoah*, recalled the maiden flight:

"Late in the afternoon, as the stiff breeze faded into a gentle zephyr, the ship was eagerly marched out on the field by a wide-eyed alert ground crew. . . . After a husky heave and the splash of dropping [water] ballast, slowly the ship ascended into the balmy sky. . . . Engine telegraphs clanked, engines started, and the soaring ship moved ahead. After a short flight of an hour or so in the vicinity, the ship landed and was housed. All had functioned well. An American rigid dirigible had flown!"

About 15,000 spectators witnessed this maiden flight. When later flights took the *Shenandoah*

over New York City, hundreds of thousands more rushed from their homes or offices, causing traffic jams as people sought a glimpse of the giant airship.

On October 10, Mrs. Edwin Danby, wife of the secretary of the navy, christened the *Shenandoah*. At this time the airship officially received her name, an Indian word meaning "Daughter of the Stars."

That same month the *Shenandoah* flew halfway across the country to Lambert Field near St. Louis, where she was the star attraction at the Pulitzer Air Races. On this flight, as a sign of his confidence in the future of Navy dirigibles, Rear Admiral William A. Moffett, chief of the newly established Bureau of Aeronautics, flew his personal pennant from the *Shenandoah*.

When the airship later flew over Boston, a reporter there described the sight: "No more beautiful or romantic vehicle had ever appeared in the skies as this graceful silver monster. . . . Majestically, she passed from the northeast to the southwest, effortlessly, almost soundlessly." Other newsmen described her as "a glittering silver arrow in the sky."

Even the usually dour President Calvin Coolidge waxed eloquent after seeing the *Shenandoah* circle above the White House. He called it "a thrilling spectacle."

But the *Shenandoah's* course did not always run smoothly. Late in the afternoon of January 16, 1924, while she was tethered to her 140-foot mast at Lakehurst, a storm with winds gusting to seventy-five miles per hour buffeted the ship. The mast held, but the dirigible was blown free, her nose torn off. Flung into the sky with only a part of her crew, the *Shenandoah* disappeared into the dark clouds. East Coast residents were alerted to watch for her as the rest of the nation anxiously awaited word of the airship's fate.

Late that evening the *Shenandoah* was seen over Newark, New Jersey, where she was unable to make headway against the storm. Finally, at 3:30 the following morning, battered but victorious, the *Shenandoah* was brought home to Lakehurst.

The airship had to her credit a number of "firsts." She was the

first dirigible to use helium rather than volatile hydrogen, and was the first to be secured to high and low mooring masts and to a naval vessel at sea. And, in August 1924, the *Shenandoah* completed a first-of-its-kind transcontinental flight—a twenty-day, nine-thousand mile circuit that carried her from Lakehurst to Fort Worth, San Diego, Spokane, and then back across the Northern Plains.

During the transcontinental flight, the *Shenandoah* was under a new commander, Lieutenant Commander Zachary Lansdowne, who had taken over in May 1924. The lanky, Annapolis-trained officer was considered stern, reserved, and a strong disciplinarian. But he was also regarded as the best airship officer in the Navy and was well-liked by his crew.

**B**Y THEN the *Shenandoah* had successfully completed fifty-seven flights, covering more than 25,000 miles and logging 750 hours in the air. She was America's darling—in constant demand for air shows, state fairs, and other celebrations. The dirigible's success and popularity caused America, particularly the Navy, to demand even more of her—while eagerly anticipating flights by her sister airship, the newly-commissioned *Los Angeles*.

The two ships shared a fuel supply. Because helium was so expensive and scarce, the *Los Angeles* received the *Shenandoah's* supply when a flight across the polar ice cap, planned for the spring of 1925, was delayed pending final approval by President Coolidge. For eight months the *Shenandoah* idled in her hangar as the *Los Angeles* completed a series of flights. In June 1925, when the *Los Angeles* began to show signs of wear, the helium was transferred back to the *Shenandoah*.

Navy officials decided to send the dirigible across America's heartland to St. Louis, Minneapolis, and Detroit. The Navy had received 248 requests for dirigible fly-overs. The *Los Angeles* had been expected to make them, but now the *Shenandoah* would complete the mission.

Numerous state fairs were scheduled in the Midwest for early Sep-



## Anderson, scampering up the swaying ladder behind Hall, felt a sudden, sickening wrench. A few feet below his legs the control car tore loose and dropped away.

tember, with huge crowds in attendance. And in Detroit, Henry Ford—a zealous new convert to aviation—was scheduled to board the dirigible for her return to Lakehurst. The Navy expected to garner a rich harvest of recruits and appropriations as a result of the publicity the flight was certain to receive.

Lansdowne protested beginning the flight so early. An Ohioan, he remembered well the thunderstorms plaguing that area during the late summer. But Navy commanders overruled his protests. The *Shenandoah* had proven her ability to handle storms. Besides, a weatherman would go along as part of the crew.

A number of changes were made in the *Shenandoah* in preparation for the Midwest flight. The sixth engine, usually mounted behind the control car, was removed to make room for a radio car. Also removed in order to prevent accidental discharge of precious helium were ten of eighteen valves that automatically jettisoned gas when the airship reached pressure height.\*

As ship's captain, Lansdowne could adjust his flight plan if the *Shenandoah's* safety so required. He was, however, directed to follow a rather strict route and schedule if possible, because of the huge crowds expected to be watching for the well-publicized fly-overs.

**N**EAR SUNSET on September 2, 1925, the *Shenandoah* prepared for her fifty-eighth flight. Besides her forty-one-man crew commanded by Lansdowne were two guests: Walter Richardson of the

\*At takeoff the gas cells in the *Shenandoah* were normally about 85 percent filled with helium. As the airship rose, the gas bags gradually filled as the gas expanded. Pressure height was the altitude at which the cells were completely full. Beyond that altitude, helium had to be released, either manually or automatically, to prevent the expanding gas from rupturing the cells.

Bureau of Aeronautics, along to photograph the flight; and Colonel C.G. Hall, representing the U.S. Army Air Service. Because Lansdowne was scheduled for reassignment to sea duty, this would be his last flight as commander of the *Shenandoah*.

As departure time neared, the last of 9,075 pounds of water ballast and 16,200 pounds of gasoline were pumped aboard. More than two thousand pounds of the water would be released on take-off, but this would later be recovered in flight as water condensed from the engines was recycled and stored in the tanks.

Lansdowne's attractive, twenty-three-year-old wife Betsy made a last-minute, impromptu trip to the Naval Air Station to see her husband off. The darkening sky alarmed her, but Lansdowne glanced aloft and told her not to worry. Shortly thereafter, she joined other Navy wives who, believing it bad luck to watch a husband's ship leave the safety of port, turned away as the dirigible rose skyward.

The *Shenandoah* settled onto her westward course. As the airship passed Philadelphia, radioman George Schnitzer dropped a tiny parachute with a note asking the finder to phone his wife and tell her that he was thinking of her.

Soon Lancaster, Pennsylvania and the Susquehanna River passed astern. Then the airship uneventfully crossed the Alleghenies, which had become the graveyard of many airplane pilots. Averaging thirty-eight knots air speed, the *Shenandoah* passed south of Pittsburgh to cross the Ohio River at Wheeling, West Virginia. At that moment, rigger Frank Peckham, patrolling a narrow catwalk atop the dirigible, noted that the ship appeared to be on course, the air was calm and warm, and all systems were functioning.

At 3 A.M., however, Chief Everett

P. Allen at the elevator wheel sensed that the *Shenandoah* was responding more slowly and beginning to pitch. Behind the airship, toward Wheeling, he saw lightning flashes, but he was only concerned, not alarmed; the *Shenandoah* had handled storms before. Nevertheless, he alerted Lieutenant Commander Lewis Hancock, Lansdowne's executive officer. Hancock studied the lightning flashes and conferred with the aerologist, Lieutenant (j.g.) Joseph Anderson and the ship's navigator, Lieutenant Commander Rosendahl. Anderson confirmed radio reports of heavy storms in the Great Lakes area but believed there was no immediate danger to the airship.

But as the dirigible neared Cambridge, Ohio, she began to buck heavy winds. Ahead and to the northwest, dark, heavy clouds were gathering. Lansdowne, who had gone to his bunk just above the control car about an hour before, was awakened, then briefed as he studied the dark sky. He ordered a slight turn toward the south, but decided against a drastic change in course. "Too many people are counting on seeing us," he explained. His apparent calm reassured the crew members.

As the airship's crewmen looked down at Cambridge, they saw the lights of the city blink out, return, then go out again. They guessed that lightning had struck a transformer.

By now the *Shenandoah* was at 3,500 feet and making no headway. Lansdowne tried to proceed at various altitudes but without success. Anderson again pointed to thunderclouds ahead and to the right, sug-

*Crewmen tumble from the plummeting control car as the Shenandoah, wrenched by violent winds from a line squall encountered over eastern Ohio, breaks up on the morning of September 3, 1925.*







gesting a turn to the south. Lansdowne permitted another slight change in course, then again tried to move the airship at a lower altitude. This time, at about 4 A.M., the dirigible found calmer air at 2,100 feet.

The *Shenandoah*, although steadier than before, continued to make little headway. At 4:30 A.M. Colonel Hall awakened and climbed down to the control car where Rosendahl, Hancock, and Lansdowne were conferring. Anderson again pointed out the dark clouds and lightning. A farmer would later describe what no one in the car could see: a dark, boiling cloud directly over the *Shenandoah*. A line squall, the violent confrontation between warm and moist and dry and cold wind currents was forming.

**E**VEN AMONG the veteran airmen, tension quietly mounted. Radium-tipped instrument dials, providing the only light in the control cabin, gave it an eerie glow. Sporadic lightning flashes momentarily etched the faces of Lansdowne, his key officers, and the crewmen manning the dirigible's controls. All maintained a disciplined calm.

At 5:08 A.M. Chief Allen at the elevators glanced at his instruments to confirm what his hands had already indicated. Then he reported, "Captain, the ship has started to rise."

Lansdowne turned his attention from his study of weather charts, then calmly but firmly ordered, "Check her." Allen strained against the wheel. Sweat beaded his forehead and palms. As if baffled by something he'd never encountered before, he reported, "I can't check her, sir."

Lansdowne scanned the dark sky, glanced at the instrument panel, then ordered full power on the engines. Even though Allen held the airship's elevators as low as he dared—the *Shenandoah*'s nose now pointed down at an eighteen-degree angle—he was unable to stop the rise. Lansdowne then ordered Ralph Joffray, who operated the rudder, to swing the ship south. But it was too late; the ship would not respond to the rudder.

The dirigible, nose down and buffeted by heavy winds, continued to

rise. Motors, racing at full speed and deprived of cooling water because of the extreme tilt, overheated. Sleeping crewmen were awakened and, sensing that the *Shenandoah* was in trouble, moved to their duty stations.

The *Shenandoah* was caught in a freak wind current. Nose now tilted down twenty-five degrees, she continued to twist and roll heavily as she rose. Already the crazily spinning altimeters showed that the airship was now above 3,800 feet, exceeding the pressure height for the gas cells.

In the keel, crewmen slid down the tilted catwalk, unable to stand or sit. The cook, J.J. Hahn, concentrating on fixing breakfast and unaware of the danger, complained angrily of spilled thermos bottles and canned goods.

Rigger Frank Masters, rolled out of his hammock by the bucking hull, hastily slipped into leather-soled slippers rather than rubber-soled sneakers. When he tried to stand, his feet flew out from under him. Like the other airmen, he wore no parachute. He nearly fell off the catwalk but grasped a girder and inched his way to safety.

The dirigible's gas cells, ordinarily flabby, were now swollen and taut, straining against their mesh coverings. Several had already exploded. Sharp cracks and pings, like ricocheting bullets, sounded in the dark keel; restraining wires were beginning to fail.

Rosendahl told radioman Schnitzer, who was required to transmit periodic position reports, that the airship's position had not changed in the past half hour.

The *Shenandoah* was now at five thousand feet, 1,200 feet above pressure height. Gazing up into the predawn light, farmers far below saw the dirigible standing almost on her nose—struggling, swinging like a huge pendulum in the sky. The airship was being sucked upward into dark, boiling storm clouds as if by a giant's hands. Soon the *Shenandoah* reached 5,500 feet and was still rising about two meters per second.

Anderson, the aerologist in the control car, finally saw the heavy, dark cloud overhead. He warned Lansdowne that they were being

drawn into a line squall with twisting currents that would likely wring the dirigible from its nose to its tail.

At six thousand feet the *Shenandoah*'s rise slowed. Lansdowne, realizing that the dirigible would probably now drop just as fast as she had risen, ordered the crew to stand by the "slip tanks," 750-pound gasoline tanks secured by wires that in emergencies the crew could cut with pliers.

Cold air gusts raked the ship, and at 6,300 feet the rise stopped. Then, almost immediately, the *Shenandoah* began to plummet.

Elevator man Allen calmly reported: "The ship's falling, Captain. She's falling fast, very fast."

Eardrums popped. The *Shenandoah* was falling twenty-five feet per second. Lansdowne remained calm, assuring others in the control car that they would be able to stop her. He ordered the last of the water ballast released and sent Rosendahl into the hull to relay orders to the crew.

Mechanic Joe Shevlowitz, who had been in Engine Car 5 but was anxious to know what was happening, climbed onto the shaking open ladder above his gondola to see the ship spinning like a merry-go-round, literally being wrung out.

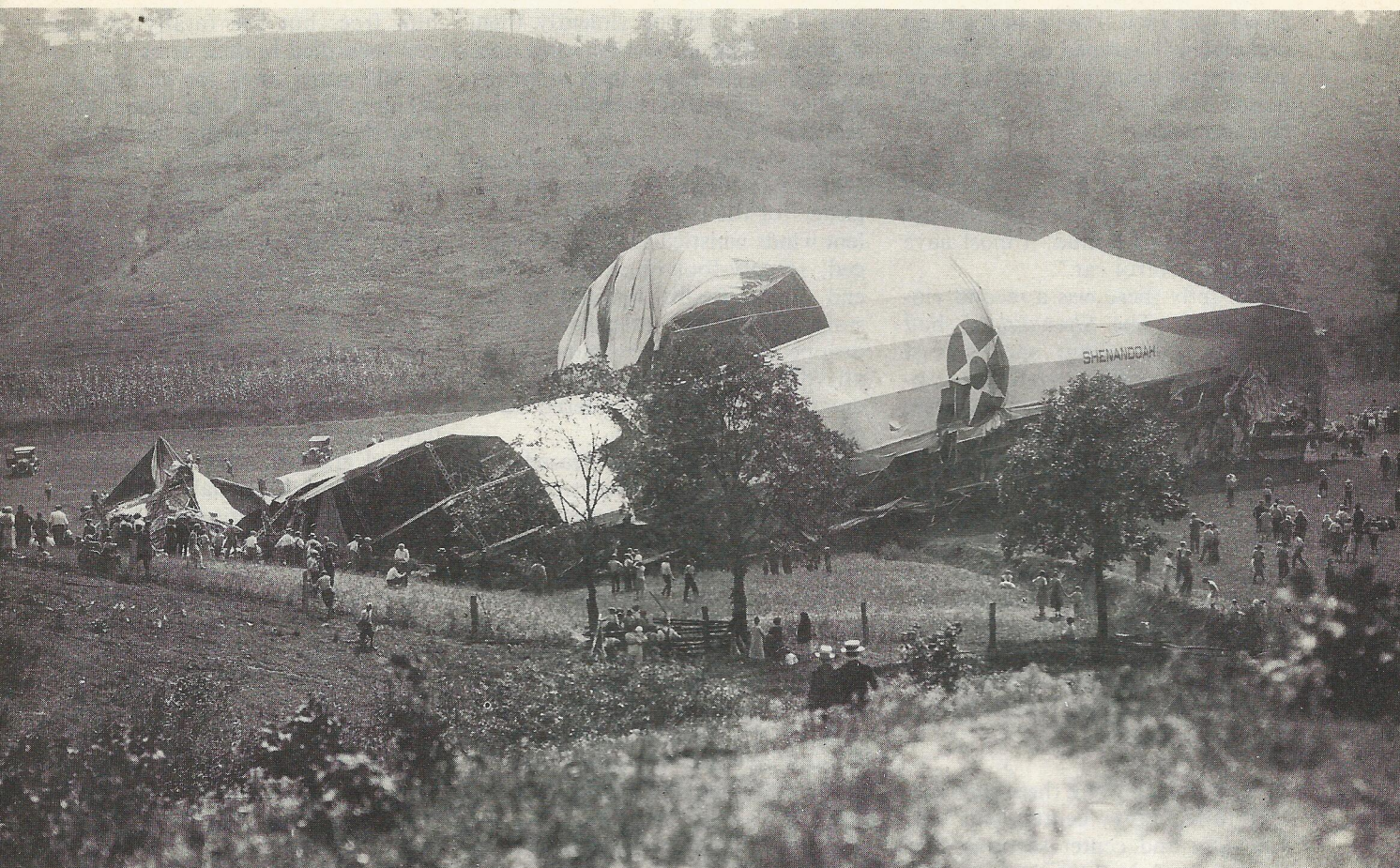
The dirigible dropped 2,800 feet in less than two minutes. Crewmen not needed at the slip tanks clambered to refuges on girders higher above the keel.

Then, at 2,600 feet, the plummeting stopped as abruptly as it had begun. The effect was like hitting a stone wall. Throughout the hull, wires snapped, and twisted girders screamed like wounded animals. More gas cells collapsed.

Before crewmen could recover, the elevator ride upward began again—even faster than before.

At about 5:30 A.M., overheated engines 1 and 2 ground to a halt. Boiling water steamed from the petcocks of the remaining three engines. Lansdowne repeated his call for full power, but his crew could no longer give it. The airship had shot up to 3,500 feet. Now it upended almost vertically. The *Shenandoah*'s crew clung to girders, believing that the ship was about to "loop the loop."





The radioman attempted a last message—"Hope to ride out the storm. Unable to get a radio to function . . ."—but he was unable to complete it.

**O**UT OF CONTROL, the ship continued to climb while simultaneously turning in a large circle. Then, at 5:45 A.M. the *Shenandoah* lurched violently and emitted a tremendous roar. The keel, two-thirds of the way forward, had snapped in two. The dirigible was broken like an egg cracked at the bottom. Her nose remained momentarily attached by strands of wire but already pointed upward at a crazy angle above the rest of the hull.

Mechanic Walter Johnson, in the rearmost engine car, saw the ship break from its belly upward, just forward of the control car. Cars 4 and 5, nearer the center of the ship, dangled loosely at an odd angle. He knew that three or four men were in those cars.

Dark objects spilled from the huge gap in the dirigible's belly.

Four men, standing on the keel directly above the break, plummeted downward. Three of them grabbed girders and miraculously were pulled to safety. The fourth, Lieutenant (j.g.) E.W. Sheppard, clung for long seconds to a strand of wires. But before rescuers could reach him, the wires pulled free amid a shower of sparks, and the officer fell free.

Seconds later the navigation car quivered violently. Its occupants felt a slight drop. Looking through the white storm cloud to the ground spinning crazily below, they realized what was happening: the car was about to break loose from the hull.

Lansdowne—calm, weary, almost detached from the situation—ordered: "Anyone who wishes to, can leave the car." Colonel Hall and Lieutenant Anderson scrambled for the ladder. Everyone else in the control car stood fast.

Anderson, scampering up the swaying ladder behind Hall, felt a sudden, sickening wrench. A few feet below his legs the control car

*Spectators and souvenir hunters converge on the wreckage of the Shenandoah's stern section a few hours after her crash. Most other portions of the airship—including the gondola and engine cars—fell to earth nearby, but high winds carried her bow another ten miles to the southwest.*

tore away and dropped fast. He closed his eyes to protect them from both the horrible sight and a shower of sparks as more than five hundred feet of control cable ripped free to follow the car's earthward plunge.

Rosendahl, in the keel above, later described that exact moment: "... my next recollection is . . . of standing there looking aft, faced with the unbelievable vision of the rest of the ship floating rapidly away from me and downward into the dull gray light of the breaking dawn. It was preceded and accompanied by the unmistakable 'cry' of metal under severe stress. . . . It was as though a thousand small metal



pieces had been thrown into a heap and violently jumped on; as though a thousand panes of glass had been hurled from on high to the pavement beneath.

"I could see the gaping open wound in the keel where the control car had been. Very shortly I heard a crash, more of a thud; it must have been the control car."

Abruptly there was a second violent crash. The *Shenandoah* had broken again, about one-third of the way forward of its tail. The center section, nearly one hundred feet long, dropped completely free. Horrified survivors clung to girders and stared at open sky through the gaping holes at each end. Weighted down by Engine Cars 4 and 5, the center section plummeted after the doomed control car. It dropped several thousand feet before the engine cars wrenched free, carrying three more men to their deaths, but allowing the much lighter hull to bound back into the sky.

**N**OW THERE WERE three torn sections: nose, center, and tail. The nose and center sections shot upward, back into the dark, boiling cloud.

The nearly three-hundred-foot-long tail section, including three engine cars and the huge rudder and elevators, dropped tail first, spinning wildly toward the dark hills below. Eight crewmen were aboard, and each in the darkened keel thought he was the only survivor. None felt he had much chance of reaching the ground safely. But just before 6 A.M. the tail section scraped wildly across a field, tearing off Engine Cars 2 and 3. As it rebounded into the air, one man was thrown into a tree's upper branches; four more leaped through torn fabric to the ground. Rigger "Red" Collier, standing atop the sole remaining engine car, casually stepped down. Having survived the crash, he would always insist that it was the easiest landing he had ever made from a dirigible.

Three men remained in the tail section, which rose, then momentarily dropped, scraping a hill. The trio reached the ground only to have the huge tail swing toward them in a giant arc. Miraculously, it skipped

over the men, shook violently, then crashed. The survivors were too shaken to do more than stare silently at each other, then back at the menacing sky.

Meanwhile, four other crewmen clung perilously to the twisted girders of the center section as violent winds whistled through the jagged, seventy-foot openings at each end. Then, finally rejected by the storm cloud, the wreckage slowly dropped. It struck the ground, flung all four men free, slid fifty feet down a hill, and shuddered to a stop.

The time was 6:06 A.M. Dazed survivors, believing all others were lost, looked upward. Seven thousand feet above them, the bow section still skated across the storm clouds.

Spinning in a horizontal plane with seven men aboard, the three-hundred-foot section continued to climb. The only sound was the wind's ghastly whistling through the torn fabric. At nine thousand feet the spinning and the ascent slowed momentarily as rain pelted the broken hull.

Rosendahl, ordering several men to valve helium when he so commanded, finally halted the climb at ten thousand feet. They continued to release helium as the wreck fell. As the section of hull neared the ground, its occupants noticed a farmer below them. They called for him to secure the dirigible's trailing wires to something solid. The farmer first tried to fasten the wires to a fence post, but they yanked free. Next he tried a tree, and the wires held. The wreckage sank to the ground, and the survivors quickly dropped free.

Rosendahl borrowed the farmer's shotgun. Its sharp blasts, at exactly 6:46 A.M., punctured the remaining gas cells. The *Shenandoah's* last flight had ended.

**S**URVIVORS from the tail section recovered first and began to search for others. A quarter-mile away they found the remains of Engine Cars 4 and 5 and three bodies that had been thrown free of the wreckage. A groan sounded from inside one of the cars. Prying open the door, the men found mechanic Celestino Mazzucco. They pulled

him free, but the fatally injured crewman died in their arms.

Fifty yards away the control car lay in a flattened heap. Seven grotesquely twisted bodies were scattered around it. Watches found on dead crew members had stopped at 5:45 and 5:47. An eighth man, Jimmy Moore, Lansdowne's personal orderly, was found in the radio compartment. Moore had never flown in a dirigible before, but had begged to be taken along so he could receive the flight pay.

Lieutenant Charles Bauch mustered the survivors at the site where he had crashed, then sent messengers to find Rosendahl. The free-ballooning bow section that had carried Rosendahl had sunk to earth at 6:45 A.M. near Sharon, Ohio, some twelve miles from the main wreck.

Rosendahl, learning from Bauch's messengers the fate of the rest of the crew, hitched a ride to the nearest town to notify Lakehurst. There he learned that ship's cook J.J. Hahn, a survivor of the stern section, had already wired Lakehurst authorities that the ship had crashed. Hahn's message identified the casualties at his crash site but added that the large bow section was still ballooning free. At Lakehurst, Hahn's message had caused wild anxiety and hopes for possible survivors among the remaining crew. But Rosendahl's report verified the deaths of the fourteen airmen.

At 7:30 A.M. in Lakehurst, the wife of the station's commanding officer informed Betsy Lansdowne of Zachary Lansdowne's death. A short time later, in western Ohio, Lansdowne's elderly mother, who had been waiting to see the *Shenandoah* pass overhead, learned that she had lost her son.

Rescuers tried to help the stunned survivors. After the dead and more severely injured were evacuated, the airship's officers were taken to town to make arrangements for the dead. Fourteen bodies were placed in black coffins that had been hastily gathered in Belle Vernon, Ohio.

Within a little more than an hour, crowds of spectators gathered at the crash sites. The few remaining crewmen guarding the wreckage were overwhelmed by souvenir hunters who began looting logbooks, instru-





ments, pieces of fabric, even girders up to eight feet long.

From Columbus, the Ohio governor ordered National Guardsmen to the scene. By the time they relieved the handful of dazed crewmen who were trying to restrain the scavengers, much of the wreckage had been removed. Despite the troops' threats to fire on the looters, the pillaging continued. For the curious, the disaster had become an outing—a holiday.

**R**ECRIMINATIONS began almost immediately. Among the earliest was the revelation that Navy regulations provided only \$150 for burial of a man who lost his life on duty. Because that amount had already been spent at the scene of the tragedy to prepare the bodies for shipment to Lakehurst, the Navy refused to pay additional funeral expenses. One body, it was charged, even arrived at a family home clad only in underwear, in a crude casket packed with excelsior.

In San Antonio, Texas, Army Brigadier General Billy Mitchell, an outspoken advocate of air power who was often publicly critical of how his superiors handled the fledgling air services, quickly became the harshest critic of the Naval authorities who had ordered the *Shenandoah's* flight into the storm-troubled Midwest. Mitchell saw the trip as a publicity stunt undertaken by the Navy with little regard for the safety of the crews involved.

Reporters besieged Mitchell for a statement. He readily responded, charging that the *Shenandoah's* crash, along with the concurrent presumed loss of a Navy seaplane en route to Hawaii, "were the result of the incompetency, the criminal negligence and the almost treasonous negligence of our national defense by the Navy and War Departments."

Mitchell's charges, reprinted in newspapers across the country, ultimately led to the Army court-martialing him. At that trial, and

*Fourteen of the Shenandoah's crew—including Lieutenant Commander Zachary Lansdowne—died in the airship's crash. Here, in a temporary morgue set up at Belle Vernon, Ohio, their coffins await shipment to relatives.*

before the Naval Court of Inquiry that investigated the *Shenandoah* disaster, Lansdowne's widow testified that her husband had been reluctant to make the flight because of turbulent weather conditions in the Midwest. She added that Lansdowne stopped protesting only after his superiors questioned his courage and willingness to obey orders.

The officers of the Army court-martial board and their counterparts on the Naval Court of Inquiry treated Mrs. Lansdowne with courtesy and deference. Her testimony, however, apparently did not affect either court's findings. Mitchell was

*Continued on page 50*



• Those seeking answers to the troubling questions that still surround the assassination of President John F. Kennedy may find them in the forbidding realms of organized crime, intelligence agencies, and international intrigue.

# World of Mirrors

by Edward Oxford

**T**HE LONE GUNMAN WAITED, looking down from a sixth-floor window of the Texas School Book Depository building. He peered through the telescopic sight of the 6.5-millimeter Mannlicher-Carcano rifle. Moving into view below him, having negotiated the hairpin turn onto Elm Street, was the limousine carrying President John F. Kennedy.

At just about 12:30 P.M. Dallas time, on Friday, November 22, 1963, the man in the window fired his rifle at the President. Worked the bolt. Fired. Worked the bolt. Fired.

Such, according to the Warren Report,\* is the way it happened. The Report found that the man who fired—and killed—was Lee Harvey Oswald. But, although the Warren Commission had searched into almost every known action and aspect of Oswald's life, it could not "ascribe to him any motive or group of motives." Deprived of firsthand observations, the Commission could offer but an inventory of suppositions. It portrayed Oswald as a man "perpetually discontented with the world around him" . . . a man who "expressed his hatred for American society" . . . a man who "sought for himself a place in history" . . . a man with a "commitment to Marxism and communism" . . . a man "capable of assassinating President Kennedy."

Most Americans, according to recent surveys, have doubts that Oswald was the assassin. They are not persuaded by government scenarios. Many sense that if Oswald really did take part in the Kennedy assassination,

\*Report, Hearings, Evidence (*President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy*, 1964).

he did not act alone. Somehow, they feel, there was a conspiracy.

Destiny has put Oswald beyond our full knowledge. Yet, tantalizingly, he seems to be with us still.

Even now, Oswald's presence can be felt on that same sixth floor. Here, moving among stacks of cartons, he used to fill orders for school books.

For much of the past twenty-five years, the work place has remained silent and dark, closed to the public. Soon, however, visitors will be welcome. The long-sealed space has been transformed into a permanent historical exhibit called "The Sixth Floor," scheduled to open on February 20 [see pages 42-43]. Here visitors will be able to walk where Oswald once worked, see the corner window from which he allegedly fired the fatal shots, and look down upon much the same street setting that he had seen. And they can ponder the mystery of this reticent, seemingly alienated man.

## The Enigmatic Man

New Orleans-born, withdrawn child, fair-to-middling student, U.S. Marine, professed Marxist, defector, husband, father, loner. Oswald had claimed to be disenchanted with the United States, with the Soviet Union, with the world.

In 1962, in the midst of the Cold War, Oswald returned to the United States after twenty-one months in the Soviet Union. American intelligence agencies claimed to have little interest in him at first; they later said they did not even "debrief" him concerning his



Russian experiences.

For reasons still unclear, a wealthy Texas oil geologist named George De Mohrenschildt took the nearly-penniless Oswald under his guidance. De Mohrenschildt, a Russian emigré born to nobility, was said to have been associated with a French and one or more American intelligence agencies.

In April 1963, someone fired a shot at and narrowly missed Major General Edwin Walker, a far-rightist, as the retired U.S. Army officer sat in his Dallas home. Dallas police never established the identity of the gunman. Although the slug recovered from Walker's home was never ballistically linked to Oswald's Mannlicher-Carcano rifle, the Warren Commission later claimed that Oswald fired the shot.

Oswald held various semi-skilled jobs—as a sheet-metal worker in Fort Worth, a graphic arts worker in Dallas, a handyman at a New Orleans coffee processing company. He earned about a dollar-and-a-quarter an hour. He could barely make ends meet.

With his wife, Marina, and their baby daughter, June, Oswald moved from one small apartment to another. At times they would stay with friends. Occasionally Lee rented a room apart from Marina and June. There were hours and days when Marina could not be sure just where he was.

In late September 1963, the Oswalds lived in New Orleans. They decided that Marina would return with June to Irving, Texas, to stay with Michael and Ruth Paine, a couple who had befriended the Oswalds. Marina was expecting her second child; she wanted to be in Texas for the baby's birth.

Oswald remained in New Orleans, ostensibly planning to seek work in Houston or elsewhere. Instead, he is said to have departed by bus for Mexico. In Mexico City, supposedly, he sought permission to visit Cuba, possibly as a first stop on the way back to the Soviet Union. He stayed in Mexico City for about a week. The necessary Cuban and Russian visas, U.S. government officials later said, were not granted. He left for Dallas, arriving on October 3, 1963.

By mid-October, Oswald found lodging at a rooming house in the Oak Cliff section of Dallas. On the sixteenth, he was hired as an order-filler at the Texas School Book Depository. On the eighteenth, he marked his twenty-fourth birthday. Two days later, Marina gave birth to their second daughter, Rachel, at Parkland Hospital.

Looking back at Oswald's somber odyssey, Kennedy assassination researchers perceive a pattern in its seemingly aimless twists and turns. Oswald, or someone

closely resembling him, appeared time and again in intriguing places under puzzling circumstances.

On September 25, 1963, Oswald was supposed to be in New Orleans, preparing to leave the next day for Mexico City. But on that day a man calling himself "Harvey Oswald" was at the Selective Service office in Austin, Texas, demanding that his dishonorable discharge from the Marines be revoked.

On the following day, when Oswald was said to have been on Continental Trailways Bus No. 5121 bound for Mexico City, a Cuban woman by the name of Sylvia Odio received an unsettling visit in her Dallas home. At the time, her father and mother were being held in Castro's jails in Cuba. Three men arrived to ask her help on behalf of Cuban exiles. Two of the men appeared to be Cubans, the third an American. He was introduced as "Leon Oswald." The next day Mrs. Odio received a call from one of the Cubans. He mentioned that "Leon" was "kind of nuts" and that he had been in the Marine Corps. He hinted that "Leon" was prepared to kill President Kennedy to avenge the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion. Eight weeks later, when Oswald was taken into custody following the Kennedy assassination, Mrs. Odio was sure he was the "Leon Oswald" who had been in her house.

According to the *Washington Post*, a "mystery witness" told Congressional investigators that a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) agent introduced him to Oswald three weeks before the President's assassination. The encounter was said to have occurred in a downtown Dallas office building. The man was founder of an anti-Castro Cuban terrorist group that worked with the CIA. He told investigators that the group held secret meetings at a house on Harlandale Avenue in the Oak Cliff section of Dallas. An informant later told Dallas police that Oswald had been at some of the meetings there.

Attorney Carroll Jarnagin practiced law in Dallas in 1963. Today he is a lawyer in Fort Worth. He recently recalled the night of October 4, 1963.

He was at Jack Ruby's Carousel Club with a woman companion, celebrating his birthday. "Jack was sitting at the table next to ours," Jarnagin says, "talking with a young fellow. Ruby was saying things about getting rid of Governor Connally, and that the Attorney General [Robert Kennedy] was a guy the boys would like to get."

Jarnagin states that the young man mentioned the "school book building, close to the triple underpass."

The following day, Jarnagin called the Texas Department of Public Safety to relate what he had overheard.

After the assassination, Jarnagin told the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) that the man he had seen with Ruby was Oswald, whom he identified from the news photos.

"I told both the FBI and the District Attorney," the lawyer recalls, "but they didn't give me much credence."

At about 1:30 A.M. on the morning of November 22, 1963, waitress Mary Lawrence saw Jack Ruby enter the

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*Edward Oxford's narrative of the Kennedy assassination, told through the recollections of some thirty eyewitnesses he interviewed, appeared in the November 1988 issue of American History Illustrated. His second article in this three-part series, focusing on contradictions and ambiguities in the various government investigations into the assassination, appeared in the January 1989 issue.*



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## **According to a CIA document, French terrorist Jean Souetre was in Dallas on the afternoon that Kennedy was shot. Within forty-eight hours, Souetre was picked up by authorities and expelled from the United States.**

B & B Restaurant in Dallas. He sat at a table, and then a young man who had been seated elsewhere joined him. Lawrence later told the FBI and the Dallas police that she thought the other man was Oswald. Two days before she talked with the FBI, the waitress received a call from an unidentified man. He told her, "If you don't want to die, you better get out of town."

Imaginings? Mistaken Memories? Such are a few of the numerous "Oswald" sightings that allegedly took place during the weeks before the Kennedy assassination.

### **The FBI's Invisible Hand**

For many Americans, it seemed almost impossible to accept that their President was downed by a lone, distraught gunman. But an equally repugnant prospect confronted them: the probability that their government knew far more about the matter than they had officially been told.

Repeatedly, through reluctant government revelations, Americans obtained startling insights into the esoteric worlds of organized crime, intelligence agencies, and foreign intrigue; glimpsed strange occurrences, twists and turns in the Kennedy assassination.

Disturbingly often, such insights conveyed disheartening intimations of official bunglings, sinister conspiracies, and cynical cover-ups.

The work of the FBI in the assassination matter, for example, seemed at the outset to have been accomplished in keeping with the illustrious reputation of this elite, highly respected agency of the United States government. The Bureau apparently had done a remarkably fast and thorough job in making—and almost closing—the "case" against Oswald.

Yet, through the Senate Intelligence Committee, the House Select Committee, and the FBI's own records, it became clear that the Bureau had also done a certain amount of dissembling—some subtle, some heavy-handed—in its investigation of Oswald.

Just hours after Oswald had been gunned down by Jack Ruby in the basement of the Dallas City Hall, for example, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover telephoned President Lyndon Johnson: "The thing I am most concerned about . . . is having something issued so we can convince the public that Oswald is the real assassin."

Shortly after the assassination, Hoover, the Justice Department, and the White House exerted pressure on senior Bureau officials to complete their investigation and issue a factual report supporting the conclusion that Oswald was the lone assassin.

The Bureau's records show, however, that Hoover anguished in private as to whether Oswald had acted alone. Hoover told J. Lee Rankin, counsel for the Warren Commission, that he personally believed Oswald was the assassin, but whether Oswald was the "only man" gave him "great concern." Hoover also told Rankin that he did not want the Warren Report, when it was written, "to be 100 percent sure" that "there was no connection between Ruby and Oswald."

Behind the scenes, the FBI clashed with the CIA concerning the Kennedy assassination. According to FBI records, the CIA, seeking to confuse and embarrass the Bureau, dispensed false information to Congressman Gerald Ford, a Warren Commission member, stating that in Mexico City Oswald had received \$6,500 to slay Kennedy. The CIA then leaked the same information to the press.

The FBI speculated that the CIA might have taken part in the Kennedy killing. The CIA in turn let it be known that Ford served as an FBI informant, keeping the Bureau apprised of the Warren Commission's behind-closed-door deliberations.

William Walter was an FBI security clerk on the midnight-to-8 A.M. shift in the Bureau's New Orleans office on the morning of November 17, 1963. Today he is a legal aide in New Orleans.

Walter recalls: "At the time, I was working my way through Tulane University. I went to school in the daytime. I handled the FBI job at night. In the early hours of the seventeenth a teletype came in from FBI headquarters in Washington, D.C. It had been sent to our field office in New Orleans, and to the field offices in Dallas, Texas, and Mobile, Alabama. The message said that 'a militant revolutionary group may attempt to assassinate the President during his visit to Dallas.' I made a copy of the message."

Walter says that at least six or seven FBI employees in the New Orleans office later saw the message. He does not know what response was made to the alert, although he points out, "You just don't ignore something like that. They would have sent some kind of communication back."

The FBI later denied the existence of any such message-alert.

The FBI's work in keeping "watch" over Oswald was mishandled, according to the Bureau's own long-after-the-fact admissions. But the FBI carefully kept its mistakes hidden from the public.

FBI agents had regularly reviewed State Department and Naval Intelligence files on Oswald. They noted that



**“It is possible that a sort of alliance, a brotherhood, got together to assassinate Kennedy. This could well have been a team put together by Cuban exiles, dissident CIA agents, and members of organized crime.”**

the Russian woman he married, nineteen-year-old Marina Nickolaevna Prusakova, had an uncle who served as a colonel in the MVD (later known as the KGB), the Soviet Union's counterintelligence service.

Sometime after Oswald's return to Texas, the FBI attempted to ascertain if he had been recruited by Soviet intelligence. Also, the Bureau grew curious as to whether Marina might be a “sleeper”—an espionage agent—for the Russians.

Oswald was subsequently “assigned” to FBI agent James Hosty, Jr., of the Dallas field office.

Now a state revenue agent in Kansas, Hosty recently recalled: “I made two visits to Marina Oswald. Lee was not home either time I talked with her. They had been staying at the house of the Paines. Ruth Paine spoke Russian. She translated for me. Marina didn't speak English. She was upset by me and by my questions. I wanted to learn what I could about her and Lee. There had been a case in which another defector had been propositioned by the KGB to marry a Russian woman and bring her to the United States. I never did interview Lee himself—not until after his arrest.”

Marina wrote down Hosty's name and license plate number and told her husband of the visits. (These pencilings were found on a page in Oswald's notebook after his death. The FBI tore the page out before turning the notebook over to the Warren Commission as evidence.) About November 8, an irate Oswald hand-delivered a note to the FBI office in Dallas. Its envelope bore one word: “Hosty.” The agent was not there to receive it.

Hosty relates: “The note said if I did not stop talking to his wife, he would take action against the FBI. It was unsigned. I did not take it to be serious. I set it aside.”

Within the Bureau, meanwhile, disquieting information concerning Oswald's trip to Mexico City had made its way to Hosty's files.

Clarence Kelley, a former FBI director, was to declare in his autobiography that “[at the Cuban Embassy] Oswald definitely offered to kill Kennedy.” According to Kelley, the FBI agent “Solo,” a double-agent, met with Premier Fidel Castro after the assassination. “Castro himself,” Kelley writes, “verified that Oswald had offered to kill the American president. . . . The dictator thought at the time that the offer might be a deliberate provocation by the U.S. government or that Oswald was simply a madman. And not knowing, they dismissed him.”

Through bureaucratic oversight, however, one FBI report on Oswald's Mexico City trip didn't reach Hosty until the end of October. Another, more detailed report

arrived at the Dallas office only hours before the assassination; it was consigned to Hosty's file.

The events of November 22 focused FBI director Hoover's wrath upon his Dallas field force. But at the time, the public knew nothing of the furor.

“That afternoon,” Hosty recalls, “I went to the Dallas police office to take part in the questioning of Lee Harvey Oswald. Unknown to me, while I was there, an agent removed the Mexico City file from my desk. And also found the Oswald note.”

When Hosty returned to his office, he was told “not to talk with Oswald again and not to tell the Dallas police anything.”

The day after the assassination, Hoover sent President Johnson a “background” report on Oswald. It omitted any reference to the FBI's files concerning Oswald in Dallas.

On Sunday, two hours after Ruby shot Oswald, Hosty's superior told him: “Jim, I don't ever want to see that Oswald note again. Oswald's dead and there can't be a trial now. It's no longer evidence.”

Hosty flushed the note down the men's room toilet.

Not until twelve years later, through Dallas newspaper reports, did the public learn what had so curiously happened to the documents—the messages regarding the Mexico City incident and the note from Oswald—in Hosty's file.

Looking back, Kelley surmises that President Johnson felt rumors of an Oswald-Soviet-Cuban connection would so arouse the American people that President Kennedy's assassination might set off World War III. Accordingly, he suggests, Johnson imposed silence on all concerned.

The silence bespoke secrecy.

## **The Dark Side of Camelot**

With time, a dark side—death-dealing espionage—loomed in the historical background of the Kennedy killing. The days of Kennedy's Camelot took on ominous shadings.

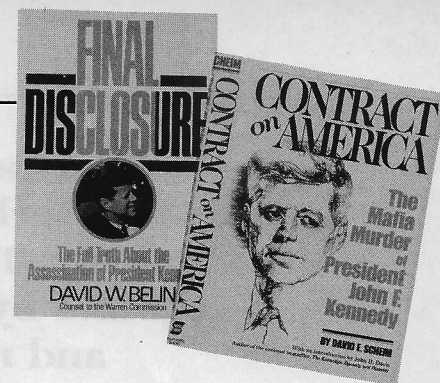
In his last presidential campaign television debate with Richard Nixon, Kennedy proposed that America support Cuban exiles in an invasion of their homeland.

The CIA set up training camps in Florida in the early 1960s. Some two thousand Cubans trained and operated under CIA auspices. They made numerous commando raids against targets in Cuba.

On April 17, 1961 the CIA backed a bold attempt by Cuban nationalists to overthrow Castro. This badly exe-



# Views and Counterviews: An Assassination Reader



**T**HE FOLLOWING TITLES, a chronological sampling of books that have examined the Kennedy assassination, express a variety of viewpoints and theories regarding this complex, emotionally-charged theme:

**Portrait of the Assassin** by Gerald R. Ford with John Stiles (*Simon & Schuster, 1965*).

This book presents a rendition of the life of Lee Harvey Oswald, based mainly on the Warren Commission's findings and written by then-Representative Ford, a former Commission member.

**Whitewash** by Harold Weisberg (*Harold Weisberg, 1965*).

Weisberg was both author and publisher of this and a series of other books that take strong issue with the Warren Report and other government investigations into the assassination.

**Rush to Judgment** by Mark Lane (*Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966*).

The author critiques the Warren Commission's inquiry into the murders of President John F. Kennedy, Officer J.D. Tippitt, and Lee Harvey Oswald.

**Accessories After the Fact** by Sylvia Meagher (*Bobbs-Merrill, 1967*).

Backed by a meticulous analysis of the Warren Report, this seminal work challenges the Warren Commission's findings concerning Oswald as lone assassin.

**Six Seconds in Dallas** by Josiah Thompson (*Random House, 1967*).

This interpretation, based upon detailed study of the events in Dealey Plaza, concludes that three gunmen fired at President Kennedy.

**Marina and Lee** by Priscilla Johnson McMillan (*Harper & Row, 1977*).

This book, a portrait of Oswald's marriage based in large part upon interviews with Marina, depicts Oswald as the assassin and describes him as "arrogant, lonely, and horribly stingy."

**Legend: The Secret World of Lee Harvey Oswald** by Edward Jay Epstein (*Reader's Digest Press, 1978*).

Depicted as the assassin, Oswald is portrayed not as an alienated loner but as a KGB puppet on a mission from Moscow.

**Conspiracy** by Anthony Summers (*McGraw-Hill, 1980*).

This exhaustive study proposes that Oswald participated in the assassination as part of a conspiracy involving anti-Castro exiles, members of the Mafia, and a "renegade element" in U.S. intelligence services.

**Best Evidence** by David Lifton (*Macmillan, 1980*).

Through painstaking analysis of the autopsy of President Kennedy, the author concludes that the "best evidence" in the assassination, Kennedy's body, was al-

lone assassin. The Bay of Pigs invasion was a cruel disappointment for the anti-Castro Cubans in America—and a major embarrassment for the Kennedy Administration. On April 24, President Kennedy, barely three months in office, announced to the nation that he accepted sole blame for the Cuban fiasco.

The CIA, apparently, had encouraged Kennedy to back the Bay of Pigs invasion. Not long after the disaster, an embittered Kennedy told aides he would like to "splinter" the CIA "into a thousand pieces and scatter it to the winds."

Instead, he assigned Attorney General Robert Kennedy to supervise the CIA's activities. These included renewed clandestine activities in Cuba. One of these, "Operation Mongoose," aimed to rid Cuba of Castro.

General Edward Lansdale, at that time one of the Administration's experts on unconventional warfare, stated that both Kennedys "wanted to bring Castro down."

The overthrow of Castro, in Robert Kennedy's

words, had "the top priority in the United States government."

Through an ironic twist, according to information received by Congressional investigators, on the same day that Kennedy was assassinated, the CIA was passing weapons and a pen with a poisoned hypodermic needle to an anti-Castro "hit man" in Paris.

Castro, in a tape recording played at a September 19, 1979 House Select Committee hearing, denied any involvement in the assassination. He told a House investigator it would have been "insane" for him to have taken part in a plot to kill Kennedy. "That," he said, "would have been the most perfect pretext for the United States to invade our country."

Questioned by a House Committee member as to why Castro assassination plots had been kept secret from the Warren Commission, former CIA director Richard Helms icily replied: "It's just an untidy world, isn't it?"

Helms said he did not know what became of thirty-seven items missing from Oswald's "201" CIA file.



tered both to conceal the fact that the President was shot from the front and to cover up the conspiracy to murder him.

**Master Index to the JFK Assassination Investigations** by Sylvia Meagher and Gary Owens (*Scarecrow Press, 1980*).

This book provides what neither the Warren Commission nor the House Select Committee gave the nation—a “key” that cross-references their reports with the volumes of testimony, evidence, and exhibits upon which they are based.

**Kennedy and Lincoln** by John Lattimer (*Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980*).

After a medical and ballistic comparison of the assassinations of the sixteenth and thirty-fifth Presidents, Lattimer, a physician, takes a pro-Warren Commission view of the Kennedy killing.

**The Plot to Kill the President** by G. Robert Blakey and Richard Billings (*New York Times Press, 1981*).

The counsel to the House Committee on Assassinations (Blakey) and a key staffer (Billings) contend that there was a conspiracy to kill Kennedy, put together by organized crime in alliance with anti-Castro elements.

**Oswald's Game** by Jean Davison (*W.W. Norton, 1983*).

Oswald took it upon himself to kill Kennedy, maintains the author, because the CIA had tried to kill Castro; the assassination was a working-out of Oswald's fantasies.

**Reasonable Doubt** by Henry Hurt (*Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1986*).

This study examines the seeming flaws in the official investigations of the assassination and sets forth the case for conspiracy.

**Mafia Kingfish** by John Davis (*McGraw-Hill, 1988*). The author of this work maintains that Louisiana Mafia chieftain Carlos Marcello may have played a leading part in the assassination because of the Kennedys' crusade against crime.

**Final Disclosure** by David Belin (*Scribners, 1988*).

A former Warren Commission assistant counsel reaffirms the Commission's basic findings and counters arguments by its critics, holding that Oswald alone shot John Kennedy.

**Contract on America** by David Scheim (*Shapolsky, 1988*).

This interpretation has the Mafia, enraged by the Kennedys' anti-crime actions, murdering the President and then ordering Oswald silenced to cover its trail.

**The Murderers of John F. Kennedy** [tentative title] by Steve Rivele (*awaiting publication*).

An American writer alleges that three French gangsters, whom he identifies, killed Kennedy at the request of American organized crime figures seeking to halt the President's war on international drug trafficking.

The following official compilations present voluminous government findings on the Kennedy assassination:

**Report, Hearings, Evidence** (*President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy, 1964*).

**The FBI Files on the Assassination of President Kennedy** (*Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1977-1978*).

**Report, Hearings, Appendix** (*House Select Committee on Assassinations, 1978-1979*).

That personnel record was created after Oswald defected to the Soviet Union in 1959.

Of the bad blood between Kennedy and Castro, Helms observed: “When one government tries to upset another government, people get killed. Whether it's an assassination or a coup makes no difference. The point is there's not a leader in the world who does not know that his life is always in danger.”

Ironically, the closest advisors to President Kennedy—Attorney General Robert Kennedy, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, and National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy—supported the attempts to depose Castro. In doing so, they may have played an unforeseen and unintended part in bringing about the President's death.

Such disclosures have offered ready-made, perhaps even plausible Cuban-connection frameworks for new interpretations of the assassination.

Gary Shaw, a long-time researcher into the Kennedy killing, has made numerous successful Freedom of In-

formation requests for once-classified government reports concerning the assassination. Shaw, who lives in Cleburne, Texas, recently described this view of what may have led to the tragedy in Dallas:

“Looking at what the government has told us so far, it is possible that a sort of alliance, a brotherhood, got together to assassinate Kennedy. This could well have been a team put together by Cuban exiles, home-grown, dissident CIA agents, and members of organized crime. They had in common a hatred for Kennedy. This was based partly on his letting down of support for the anti-Castro forces, in part on his growing opposition to the CIA itself, and in part on his efforts against organized crime. All three—the exiles, the CIA individuals, and the mobsters—wanted Cuba back in friendly hands.”

Shaw feels that when “ZR/Rifle,” the CIA's in-place assassination apparatus, was directed toward Castro, the planners enlisted the aid of Robert Maheu, chief assistant to industrialist Howard Hughes. Maheu went to Sam Giancana in Chicago, and Santos Trafficante in



## **Assassination researcher Steve Rivele alleges that three French gangsters killed Kennedy at the request of American organized crime figures seeking to halt the President's war on international drug trafficking.**

Florida, both highly involved in Havana gambling interests. They were to provide hit men.

"Carlos Marcello in New Orleans," Shaw says, "later said someone had already been set up to take the rap. Oswald's uncle, 'Dutz' Murret, and Oswald had direct ties to organized crime in New Orleans, where Marcello was the kingpin."

Marcello had first crossed swords with Robert Kennedy in the 1950s when the future attorney general was chief counsel for the Senate Committee on labor racketeering and organized crime. The disregard was mutual. Even before the President's inauguration, the attorney-general-designate targeted the Mafia overlord of Louisiana for attention by the Justice Department. Three months after President Kennedy assumed office, Robert Kennedy personally saw to it that Marcello was arrested without warning in New Orleans, handcuffed, and flown out of the country—on a long-standing deportation order. When an irate Marcello returned to challenge the order, the attorney general ordered FBI director Hoover to pressure Marcello.

In September 1962, according to an informant testifying before the House Select Committee, Marcello had "clearly stated that he was going to have President Kennedy murdered in some way." At his three-thousand-acre plantation near New Orleans, Marcello used a striking analogy during a conversation with an associate: "The dog will keep biting you if you only cut off its tail. But the dog would die if you cut off its head."

Today Marcello is in the Federal Correctional Institution in Texarkana, Texas, serving a sentence for a bribery conviction unrelated to the assassination matter.

"It could be," Shaw says, "that the Marcello people knew Oswald had intelligence ties. So they could key in on that. He was set up to hand out 'Fair Play for Cuba' pamphlets in New Orleans."

"Oswald was led into taking the Book Depository job. At the time of the assassination, Oswald was not on the sixth floor. He was in the lunchroom on the second floor, just as he said he was."

*In addition to examining official and unofficial records at the National Archives and the Assassination Archives and Research Center in Washington, D.C., author Edward Oxford interviewed or obtained written responses from most of the individuals quoted in the text. Persons contacted included attorney Carrol Jarnagin, former FBI clerk William Walter, former FBI agent James Hosty, Jr., Dr. Lawrence Alderson, former CIA employee James Wilcott, former President Gerald Ford, attorney Bernard Fensterwald, Jr., and attorney James Lesar.*

In this scenario, which a number of researchers agree could be a possibility, an assassination team originally formed to kill Castro could conceivably have been the same group that killed Kennedy.

"If this were so," Shaw says, "key agencies and key people in government, including Robert Kennedy, would be compromised. It would have been a case of foreign policy going wrong, then government covering it up."

### **A French Connection?**

Dallas researcher Mary Ferrell in 1977 discovered a rather puzzling CIA document dated April 1, 1964. In it, the French government's intelligence agency asked the CIA for help in locating Jean Souetre, alleged to be a French Secret Army Organization terrorist and a threat to French President Charles de Gaulle. The French wanted to ensure the safety of de Gaulle, who was planning a trip to Mexico.

According to the document, Souetre was in Fort Worth, Texas on the morning of November 22, 1963. That same morning President Kennedy was also in Fort Worth. At 12:30 P.M. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas; Souetre was also in Dallas that afternoon.

Within forty-eight hours after Kennedy's death, the document stated, Souetre was picked up by U.S. authorities in Texas and expelled from the United States.

No official statement has been made as to why the U.S. authorities picked up Souetre after the assassination.

The international political atmosphere at the time was ominous. President Kennedy had long been an outspoken supporter of Algerian independence. The right-wing Secret Army Organization, consisting mainly of former French soldiers, violently opposed de Gaulle's "giving away" Algeria. Nevertheless, in 1962 he granted independence to Algeria. The organization allegedly made more than thirty assassination attempts against de Gaulle. Next to the French President, some researchers feel, the group hated Kennedy the most.

In a roundabout way, the Algerian turmoil reached out to Dr. Lawrence Alderson, a long-time Houston resident. Alderson had served with the U.S. Army in France in 1953. There he had met and befriended Souetre, then a French Air Force captain.

Dr. Alderson remembers: "For weeks after the assassination, I was followed by FBI agents. I was interviewed by the FBI. The agents told me the Bureau had traced Souetre to Dallas a day before the assassination



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**“I know of at least one man who can tell the truth of how the assassination took place. He is alive and on the government’s payroll. He knows who Oswald was and what he did and what he didn’t do.”**

and then lost him. They felt Souetre had either had a hand in killing Kennedy or knew the person who had killed him. And they were trying to find out who flew Souetre out of Dallas that day. They said they wanted to meet with him on any ground rules, anywhere in the world. I couldn’t help them.”

Anderson feels that “Souetre was a dedicated Frenchman. He was a dashing career officer in his thirties. He felt his country was being sold out. So he went underground in Algiers.

“We used to send Christmas cards to one another,” says Anderson. “The last I heard, Jean Souetre ran a casino in the French Alps.”

Souetre claimed that an old enemy of his, Michel Mertz, may have been impersonating him.

Among Oswald’s effects was found a photograph showing him with a man he had called “Alfred from Cuba.” The man strongly resembled Souetre.

Is there a French connection in the assassination puzzle? A number of researchers think so, and for years have been trying to track down information concerning not only Souetre, but also several other individuals in French clandestine operations—both intelligence and terrorist groups.

Culminating years of research, Steve Rivele of Los Angeles has written a book tentatively titled *The Murderers of John F. Kennedy*. Prepublication newspaper comment indicates that the book will make startling allegations about the assassination.

Rivele contends that French gangsters killed Kennedy at the request of American organized crime figures, to halt the President’s war on international drug trafficking.

Rivele’s research took him to three continents. His findings formed the basis for a two-hour British Central Independent Television documentary titled “The Men Who Killed Kennedy” that was broadcast in England and France in October 1988.

According to the television report, Rivele was told by two French drug lords, Christian David and Michel Nikoli, that Kennedy was shot by three members of a Marseilles mob group. Oswald, the only man ever charged with shooting Kennedy, was not involved in the assassination, Rivele maintains.

Rivele claims that Lucien Sarti, a French gangster shot to death in Mexico City in 1972, was the assassin who fired the fatal shot into Kennedy’s head from the grassy knoll. Sarti, says Rivele, was dressed at the time as a Dallas police officer. One of the most successful contract killers and drug traffickers of his era, accord-

ing to Rivele, Sarti was notorious for his use of exploding bullets.

Rivele identified the two other gunmen as Roger Bocognani, now believed to be working in Colombia’s illicit cocaine business, and Sauveur Pironti, who now lives in Marseilles following his recent release from prison. Rivele says Bocognani and Pironti fired at Kennedy from the former Dal-Tex building, across from the Texas School Book Depository building on Houston Street. The three are said to have fired within seconds of one another.

Pironti has denied the allegations, maintaining that he was on military duty in France at the time Kennedy was killed. He acknowledged, however, that the late Corsican mob chieftain Antoine Guerini had offered him a contract to kill an unidentified person in an undisclosed place. Guerini is identified by Rivele as the French mob boss who hired the three gunmen who he says killed Kennedy.

Rivele says that prior to the assassination Sarti, Pironti, and Bocognani were flown from Marseilles to Mexico City, where they spent three or four weeks.

They were then allegedly driven to Brownsville, Texas, entering the United States with Italian passports. They were picked up and driven to Dallas, where there stayed in a “safe house.” They took photos of Dealey Plaza and studied them, arranging for the “crossfire” of three rifles.

Rivele was told by Christian David, former leader of the Corsican drug network in South America and an agent for intelligence services in various countries, that two assassins were placed in a building “behind Kennedy’s limousine”—one high, one low. Sarti was positioned behind the picket fence on the grassy knoll.

The three-man assassination team remained under cover at “safe houses” for ten days following the killing. They were then flown to Montreal and back to Marseilles. According to Rivele, the assassins were paid in heroin.

Rivele says that the major participants in the assassination all had connections with U.S. intelligence agencies.

The television program describing Rivele’s theories included a sequence featuring Gordon Arnold, who lives and works in Dallas. At the time of the Kennedy assassination Arnold had been home from Army basic training, and he had been watching as the Presidential motorcade passed the Texas School Book Depository.

While awaiting the arrival of the motorcade, Arnold, in his Army uniform, had walked up behind the grassy



# “The Sixth Floor”

**A**BRAMHAM LINCOLN once observed that “We cannot escape history.”

The seven-story red-brick building that stands at 411 Elm Street in downtown Dallas is an enduring case in point.

Here—overlooking Dealey Plaza, the grassy knoll, the triple underpass—is the same block-long structure that drew unbidden worldwide attention on November 22, 1963.

On that day the building was known as the Texas School Book Depository, a storage and shipping point for textbook publishers. One of the stock clerks who worked there was Lee Harvey Oswald. Near the stroke of 12:30 P.M. Dallas time, according to official accounts, Oswald, crouching at a sixth-floor window, fired the shots that killed President John F. Kennedy.

Few other commercial structures in America have so compelled the attention of everyday citizens. Tens of millions of transfixed Americans, having seen the image of the red-brick edifice repeatedly on television and in newspapers and magazines, came to know it as a haunting symbol of the Kennedy assassination. And each year thousands of visitors to Dallas, drawn to Dealey Plaza, have stood wordlessly and looked up at the structure’s inexpressive facade.

The building’s exterior still appears much as it did twenty-five years ago—with one notable exception. The familiar Hertz sign (its electric clock had flashed the numerals “12:30” as Kennedy was shot) is no longer on the roof. It has been dismantled and remanded to the basement. But all else—the arched windows, the trees below, the traffic on Elm street—remains much as it was then. The real changes are to be found inside.

Today the former Book Depository serves as the

Dallas County Administration Building. On the first five floors, clerks, lawyers, and planners go about the business of county government.

For nearly a quarter of a century the ominous sixth floor stood empty and dark, sealed off from public access. But now the storeroom’s entire ten-thousand-square-foot expanse, where books used to be stacked on plywood flooring, has been remodeled into a remarkable exhibit site that chronicles the assassination and its surrounding events. A brick-enclosed, sixty-foot-high elevator tower behind the building provides access to the display.

In the exhibit, titled “The Sixth Floor,” visitors can experience in step-by-step sequence a sense of the assassination in the context of its times. Photographic displays, charts, graphs, and films portray the mood of the 1960s; Kennedy’s Texas trip; the assassination weekend; the investigations; the search for a motive; the long-term meaning of the assassination.

At a glass-enclosed area at the southeast corner of the exhibit, visitors can behold the “sniper’s perch” from where the alleged killer is said to have shot President Kennedy. Book cartons are stacked next to the window just as they were arranged that day, apparently to provide concealment and an improvised armrest for the sniper. From adjacent windows, visitors can gaze down on the stretch of Elm Street along which the President’s motorcade was moving when he was shot.

At the corner opposite the “sniper’s perch” is a stairway, also protected by a glass enclosure. Near this stairway the alleged murder rifle was found, as was Oswald’s work-order clipboard. The assassin, many theories hold, left the building via these stairs.

“The Sixth Floor,” created at a cost of \$3.5 mil-

knoll in Dealey Plaza. There he was approached by a man wearing a side arm, who pulled out an identification badge, said he was with the Secret Service, and then told Arnold to leave the knoll. Arnold, who was holding a movie camera, complied. Positioning himself in front of the picket fence that overlooks the knoll, he began filming the motorcade.

A bullet from behind whizzed past his left ear. He automatically hit the ground. Then someone dressed as a police officer took his camera.

During the television program last October Arnold was shown a computer-enhanced photo of the knoll, taken at the time Kennedy was shot. Looking at the picture, Arnold identified himself in it, then observed an image said to depict a muzzle blast and a uniformed figure. “If this is true,” he said, “then I could be the only man who ever saw the man that killed the Presi-

dent. . . . If I’d known this photo was here I wouldn’t have given this interview.”\*

Tempering the credibility of Rivele’s assertions is the possibility that the same French mob chieftains who helped him track down the supposed members of such a hit team were themselves capable of effecting the venture. Whether they misled him remains to be seen.

Has Steve Rivele somehow “solved” the assassination’s key question? Or has he been duped? The carefully developed Rivele view remains a conjectural scenario—at this point no less unlikely, no more readily provable, than many others. Unlike most, however, it pinpoints individuals.

Immediately following the television broadcast last October, Rivele received death threats and for a time

*\*Gordon Arnold declined to be interviewed for this article, expressing concern for his privacy and well-being.*





lion, complements the city's earlier attempts to come to grips with the Kennedy Assassination. For some years, a bronze marker in Dealey Plaza has offered a diagram of the setting. Several blocks away, a large, white-stone cenotaph erected in 1970 has borne silent testament to John F. Kennedy.

Many Dallas residents, seeking to banish the memory of the heart-rending tragedy associated with their city, favored razing the Texas School Book Depository. But after much debate, city planners finally resolved to chronicle rather than to conceal history.

Accordingly, "The Sixth Floor" documents the assassination with forthright objectivity. With due regard for the controversy still surrounding the event, the exhibit points out that many Americans believe Kennedy was killed as the result of a conspiracy. Dal-

las presents the building and its story to the world, and lets people draw their own conclusions.

"'The Sixth Floor' exhibit," says Lindalyn Adams, president of the Dallas County Historical Foundation, "is meant as an educational and historical exhibit. It is not meant as a memorial.\* It is a recognition of an historical event."

"The Sixth Floor" is scheduled to open on President's Day, February 20, 1989. An admission fee is charged. For further information, contact the Dallas County Historical Foundation, Dallas County Administration Building, 411 Elm Street, Dallas, Texas 75101-3301 or telephone 214-653-6666. ★

*\*Technically, the nation's official memorial to President Kennedy is the Kennedy Library in Boston. And the "Eternal Flame" still burns in Arlington National Cemetery.*

went into hiding. As of this writing, no firm date has been set for publication of his book. It had originally been scheduled to appear in November 1988.

## A World of Mirrors

A world of mirrors seems to form the backdrop to the Kennedy assassination. In it researchers have occasionally caught glimpses of what they take to be unexplained maneuverings by several U.S. intelligence agencies, notably the Central Intelligence Agency.

The CIA had, for example, seemingly taken more than a passing interest in the possibility of Oswald as Russian agent. When Uri Nosenko, a ranking official of the Soviet KGB, defected to the United States in February 1964, he revealed that the Russians had bugged the American embassy in Moscow. He named certain agents

in the West. And he said that he had inspected the KGB file on Oswald. The KGB, he said, viewed Oswald as mentally unstable. According to Nosenko, Oswald did not act as a Russian agent in the Kennedy killing.

Congressional investigators learned that the CIA was determined to find out how much Nosenko really knew about Oswald, and whether the former KGB official was a true defector or a "plant."

For more than three years, on its own authority and in almost certain violation of American law, the CIA kept Nosenko in solitary confinement. He was held under constant guard, with a light bulb burning continuously in his windowless cell. For a time he was kept in a specially built twelve-by-twelve-foot steel vault.

Nosenko finally "cracked." He was rigged to a lie-detector and questioned for more than one hundred days. After three-and-a-half years in CIA hands, he was



released.

Much argument took place within the CIA as to whether Nosenko was what he said he was—a true defector. By 1976 the CIA had apparently accepted him at his word. Nosenko was given a new identity and a CIA assignment.

Compounding the complexity, certain CIA investigators believed Oswald was working for U.S. intelligence, that he was ordered to infiltrate the KGB, and that this explained his life in Russia. They also believed that Oswald proved to be so unstable that he was “handled” by the KGB into becoming a triple-agent and assigned to the Dallas job.

CIA sources speculated that a high-level CIA official, in reality a KGB “mole,” had ordered someone to murder Oswald. This man allegedly thought he was to kill Oswald because Oswald had turned traitor. Actually it was to prevent Oswald from revealing that the Russians had ordered him to kill Kennedy.

No official statement has ever been made by the CIA concerning the merit of such seemingly far-fetched theories.

James Wilcott, who now lives near Berkeley, California, served with the CIA for nine years. He was stationed in Tokyo during the period when Oswald, as a U.S. Marine, was stationed at Atsugi Air Base, about thirty-five miles to the south. Atsugi was where American U-2 spy planes, which performed secret reconnaissance flights over Russia, were based.

Wilcott testified behind closed doors at the House Select Committee hearings in 1978.

“It was common knowledge in the CIA Tokyo station,” he stated a few weeks ago, “that Oswald was an agent of the CIA, and that he was sent to Japan as a double agent. In the early sixties there was a rift between the ‘Kennedy liberals’ in the Agency and the hard-core conservatives. The hard-liners won out with the death of Kennedy.

“The question was,” says Wilcott, “who Oswald was working for over there. An official CIA project? Or a National Security Council project? Or CIA people on their own? These guys were taught to kill first and ask permission later.

“It was said the CIA had some special ‘handle’ on Oswald, something they held over his head. The CIA taught him Russian. It was a risky mission.

“Almost as soon as he stepped on Russian soil, the KGB was on to him. When Oswald linked up with Marina, the KGB nabbed them both. Then the KGB worked out an arrangement that Oswald would be shipped back to the United States, Marina along with him.”

As for Oswald’s part in the Kennedy assassination, Wilcott feels that “he was just what he said he was. A patsy.

“CIA people killed Kennedy,” says Wilcott. “They had the President murdered because he had reneged on an agreement with then-CIA director Allen Dulles to provide air support for the 1961 invasion of Cuba.

“Right after the President was killed,” Wilcott recalls, “people in the CIA Tokyo station were talking openly about Oswald’s having gone to Russia for the CIA. Everyone was wondering how the Agency was going to be able to keep the lid on Oswald. I thought it was too big a matter to cover up for long. But I guess they have managed to do it.”

## Of Time and Truth

Former President Gerald Ford, among others, feels that such conjectures about conspiracy are just that. A member of the Warren Commission, he has stated of its work: “Truth was our only client.” Ford called the House Select Committee’s efforts a “waste of taxpayers’ money.” In response to a query from this author, he writes:

“The fundamental conclusions of the Warren Commission are fully justified by all the evidence. Lee Harvey Oswald was the assassin and the Commission found no evidence of a conspiracy, foreign or domestic. Furthermore, no new credible evidence has been uncovered that undercuts the Commission’s basic determination.”

But in the view of many researchers, truth has been not so much a client as a casualty.

They contend that were it not for the Zapruder film, the critics’ efforts, and the Freedom of Information Act, the nation would know far less of the full truth about the assassination than it now knows.

Even highly-regarded publications that once unconditionally accepted the government’s one-gunman conclusion as unassailable have, with the passage of a quarter-century, had second thoughts. For example, when the *New York Times* marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Kennedy assassination, its editors included an old photo taken on the sixth floor of the Dallas School Book Depository building. In 1963 the *Times* had described the scene as “the spot from which Oswald shot the President.” The new caption read: “Shortly after the assassination of President Kennedy, reporters stood at the spot . . . from which Lee Harvey Oswald’s rifle was fired.” [emphasis added.]

Bernard Fensterwald, Jr., a Washington attorney, is president of the Assassination Archives and Research Center in Washington, D.C. This private, nonprofit archives, located a block from FBI headquarters, houses an extensive collection of files, books, transcripts, court papers, and government documents on the Kennedy assassination.

Fensterwald is quite skeptical of the government’s handling of the Kennedy case.

“The House Select Committee,” he says, “did not try to discover who that second shooter was. You would have thought that Congress would go to the ends of the earth to find out who he was.

“They were frightened to death. They saw what had happened to Sam Giancana. And how Johnny Roselli was taken out. Then there’s George De Mohrenschildt, the man who ‘babysat’ Lee Harvey Oswald as an agent.



Three hours after they summon him to testify, he winds up dead from a shotgun blast. And it is called suicide.

"In the end, they turned over the whole search to the Justice Department, knowing it wouldn't lift a hand to solve the murder."

The Justice Department, Fensterwald points out, ended its nearly ten-year inquiry into the assassination in March 1988—but did not inform the public. A Justice Department memo to the House Judiciary Committee stated the Department could find no "persuasive" evidence of a conspiracy in the Kennedy killing—and it would look no further. Case quietly closed.

"The memo," Fensterwald notes, "was unsigned and undated."

Attorney James Lesar is vice president of the archives. In the past fifteen years he has filed more than fifty Freedom of Information requests, calling upon the National Archives, the FBI, the CIA, the Department of Defense, the Department of State, and numerous other government agencies to let the public see their remaining records on the assassination.

"The FBI, with much prodding, has released thousands of its documents. But the Bureau still withholds massive files concerning the Kennedy assassination," Lesar says. "It has major files on the shooting, on Lee Harvey Oswald, on Marina Oswald, on Jack Ruby, and on other key subjects."

Lesar finds little point in the FBI's continuing to withhold such files. "It is difficult to see how, after twenty-five years, any national secrets are at stake. Of course, there might be isolated instances of personal reputations better left untouched."

To Lesar, "It is an absurdity to pay people to apply black ink to passages of documents to hide the words. It doesn't make sense."

He feels the Bureau's reluctance to reveal reports is self-protective: "The FBI realizes there is still much in its files that reflects poorly on them. They have chosen to stonewall. They will string things out for years, for decades."

As for the CIA: "I see more ominous concealments there, not just bureaucratic cosmetics. I think the CIA has a lot to hide concerning the Kennedy matter, and they want to keep it hidden. There are people in power who know how to use the magic phrase 'national security.'"

The search continues.

"J. Edgar Hoover headed up the FBI for almost fifty years," Fensterwald says. "When he died in 1972 he left behind a bunch of 'do-not-file' files. There may have been something there. But how is one ever to know?"

The Associated Press reported that Hoover's secretary, Helen Gandy, had at the FBI director's instruction systematically destroyed his private files shortly after his death. Over several days, she tore up and then destroyed the papers and memos that were held in some thirty file drawers. But other Hoover files have survived.

"In our work at the Assassination Archives, we get assistance from the FBI," Fensterwald states. "The FBI

is as curious as to who killed Kennedy as we are. Had they really investigated—when the trail was fresh—they might have found the answer. But they did not."

The arrow, he feels, points to Oswald's Mexico City trip.

"The government says the planning for the assassination may have taken place there," Fensterwald says. "Someone calling himself Oswald showed up at the Cuban and Russian embassies. The CIA had both embassies covered, with cameras and listening devices. They have pictures of a man they call Oswald. But it isn't Oswald."

Oswald, he says, "is still a bewildering figure. Every time he made a move something odd happened. There are many things we still don't know about him. He just disappeared for stretches of time. We all have 'funky' things—mishaps and such—happen in our lives. But 'funky' things were happening to Oswald every other day. It is strange. Stranger, I think, than coincidence."

## The Quest Continues

The Oswald persona—though nearly every phase of his troubled life has been painstakingly probed and pondered—remains an enigma. Ruth Hyde Paine, in whose house Lee and Marina Oswald lived for a time before the assassination, felt that Oswald's erratic behavior could be explained as that of a man losing his mind. His brother Robert thought that Lee's seemingly suspicious actions illustrated "his disintegration during the last months of his life. He was desperate." Oswald's tragic end, Robert stated, was "the effect of a thousand rejections."

For them a madman—not machinations—killed Kennedy.

But Fensterwald and many others look beyond the man—toward barely glimpsed figures somewhere in a nearly impenetrable world of secrets, who, through whatever beguilement, may have enrolled Oswald in their cause and moved him to serve their purposes.

Fensterwald thinks that long-sought "answers" to the assassination can yet be found.

"There may be a piece of paper in some file that will give us a decisive sliver of evidence," Fensterwald says. "More likely, there are bits of knowledge, walking around in the minds and memories of a very few persons. The ones who know what happened."

Does he know of such an individual?

"Yes," Fensterwald says. "I know of at least one man who can tell the truth of how the assassination took place. He is alive and on the government's payroll. He knows who Oswald was and what he did and what he didn't do."

Would the man talk about it—to the American public?

"No. He wants to stay alive." ★

*Free-lance writer Edward Oxford works out of New York City. He is a frequent contributor to American History Illustrated.*



## El Presidente Gringo *Continued from page 20*

sick left behind, Walker was lionized by some American newspaper editors.

**E**NCOURAGED by the enthusiasm for his cause in the United States, Walker decided to dispense with the charade of a puppet government and become Nicaragua's *Presidente*. On June 29, 1856, Walker's paper, *El Nicaragüense*, announced that an enormous election turnout had given him the presidency. Although the origin of the votes he claimed begged explanation, the American took office. He ignored the fact that the Nicaraguan constitution expressly excluded from office all who were not native-born.

Back in the United States, Walker had become something of a folk hero—an intrepid American adventurer defying the odds and taking on all foreign enemies in the name of liberty, democracy, justice, and American values. Crowds of sympathizers cheered his exploits at public meetings; newspaper headlines applauded his victories and lamented his defeats. He was toasted at banquets. In New York, a musical entitled *Nicaragua or General Walker's Victories* opened at Purdy's National Theater in July 1856. With a cast of characters that included "General Walker, the Hope of Freedom" and "Ivory Black, superior nigger," the musical featured the "Filibuster Overture" as well as patriotic favorites such as "Columbia, the Pride of the Ocean," "Yankee Doodle," and, of course, "The Star Spangled Banner."

On assuming the presidency, Walker presented his Inaugural Address. Sleepless vigilance, untiring devotion to liberty, an ardent resolve, and dedication to peace and progress—the message of *El Presidente* struck familiar patriotic notes. The victory of the "Immortals" would, he declared, usher in a new era; it was the culmination of Nicaraguan revolution against Spanish monarchy finally achieved after many years. Other Central American countries, driven by jealousy and the political enmity of a host of "imbecile rulers," would be unable to impede Nicaragua's noble experiment in democracy. The new epoch would inaugurate freedom of speech (with the new additional official language of English as well as Spanish), social order, an increase in commerce, a maturation of the arts, a sweeping away of crusty institutions by the strong winds of intellectual and moral advancement. "And for carrying out these intentions with success, I humbly invoke the aid of Him, without whose assistance all Human exertions are but a bubble on a stormy sea."

Although he now held power, Walker nested on a precarious perch. Groping for allies, money, guns, and troops—and opposed by Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Costa Rica, much of Nicaragua, and Cornelius Vanderbilt—Walker, on September 22, 1856, made a bold, calculated move. He issued a decree annulling legislation that had abolished slavery in Nicaragua several decades earlier.

Walker was making an overt appeal to the American South. Here in Nicaragua, Walker said, was a new out-

post for the expansion of slavery. Here was the answer to Southern political leaders who sought a way to tip the balance of power between North and South. "Is it not time," he asked, "for the South to cease the contest for abstractions and to fight for realities? . . . How else can she strengthen slavery than by seeking its extension beyond the Union?"

To John Wheeler, the U.S. ambassador to Nicaragua, Walker's decree was sweet music. Wheeler was from North Carolina and a slave holder. He now saw Nicaragua breaking forth into a veritable Nirvana. He enthused over the arrival of eager white settlers, the sweet hum of new machinery, the cheerful roll of American carts through the streets. Only through slave labor, he saw, could the rich soil of Nicaragua be adapted to the culture of cotton, sugar, rice, and other staples. Wheeler and other Walker followers dashed off letters to friends in the Southern states seeking support for this new slave land.

The *Richmond Enquirer* declared, "This [is a] magnificent country General Walker has taken possession of in the name of the white race. . . . Here is a new state soon to be added to the South, in or out of the Union." Walker had succeeded in placing himself and Nicaragua deeply in the slavery debate. He hoped it would bolster his own government.

But his army was now meeting determined and sometimes fierce resistance. At San Jacinto Hill near Tipitapa, three hundred of Walker's fighters were routed. Their leader, Byron Cole, who had originally brought Walker to Nicaragua, was hanged by a group of peasants. And at San Jacinto a Nicaraguan named Andres Castro became a future national hero when he killed a filibuster with a rock.

At the town of Masaya, the "Immortals," numbering about eight hundred, fought a combined Central American force of about 2,300. Both sides suffered severe losses. Walker retreated to Granada.

With the Central American combined offensive gathering strength, Walker's position rapidly deteriorated. He had now lost many men in the field, while others were ravaged by cholera. Although the Puritan martinet continued to preach morality, many of his men succumbed to the bottle and other vices. Demoralized, many of the "Immortals" saw their chances for survival rapidly fading. But Walker seemed oblivious, his grip on reality ebbing as the situation grew more critical. He waited for reinforcements.

Walker's business friends in the United States—Vanderbilt's rivals—responded with Charles Frederick Henningsen, one of Europe's most skilled soldiers of fortune. Arriving in Granada, he brought men, rifles, howitzers, mortars, and years of fighting experience in Spain, Russia, and Hungary.

The Henningsen-trained "Immortals" attacked Virgin Bay with artillery support and, although outnumbered four-to-one, beat back the Costa Ricans. But following another engagement at Masaya, more than fifty



American bodies lay scattered among those of hundreds of Guatemalans. The highly-skilled mercenary force, even with its reinforcements, began to crumble.

In mid-November 1856, Walker finally decided to abandon Granada. He informed Henningsen that the Americans would retreat to the volcanic island of Omo-tepe in Lake Nicaragua. He ordered Henningsen to stay behind with three hundred men and burn the 332-year-old city of Granada.

In a drunken haze, the smoke-blackened filibusters looted and torched the town they had supposedly come to civilize. For two days and nights flames and black clouds engulfed the ancient city. At the height of this orgy of destruction, the combined armies of Central America attacked Granada. Henningsen soon found himself trapped in the town's Guadalupe Cathedral.

Despite the added burdens of death and disease, Henningsen's men were able to blunt the enemy's attacks for two weeks. Finally, on December 12, just as the beleaguered force was running low on food and ammunition, its survivors, aided by a rescue party Walker sent, broke out of the cathedral and fled Granada. They left behind more than two hundred dead. In the smoking rubble Henningsen left a sign that read "Aquí Fué Granada" ("Here was Granada").

Walker later tried to justify his burning of the city. Its inhabitants, he insisted, had turned on the Americans, their leaders and protectors. They had become spies and had abetted the enemy. "By the laws of war," Walker wrote, "the town had forfeited its existence; and the policy of destroying it was as manifest as the justice of the measure."

With his battered forces strangling in confusion and disarray, Walker now held only a small area at the western end of the transit route. In several skirmishes in early 1857, the Central American forces, aided by money, men, and supplies from Vanderbilt, inflicted heavy casualties on Walker's remaining troops.

For the first time, desertions by the "Immortals" became a serious problem. A series of cleverly timed raids planned by Vanderbilt's agents enabled the Costa Ricans to seize all the transit steamers and the ports on the San Juan River, cutting off Walker's supply lines from the east. To survive, his men were forced to eat their horses and mules. Walker nevertheless exhorted his dying army to fight on, declaring that "The destiny of this region and the interests of humanity are confided to our care."

Although fighting continued sporadically through April 1857, it was clear that the filibuster force had been decimated. Now the only question was whether or not Walker would escape the country alive.

On May 1, 1857, Commander Charles E. Davis of the U.S. sloop-of-war *St. Mary's* negotiated safe passage out of Nicaragua for *El Filibustero*, his troops, and other Americans. Four hundred and sixty-three men returned to the United States.

Walker's losses had been staggering—according to some estimates, as high as five thousand dead and miss-

ing. Hundreds of survivors were left behind in Nicaragua, many of them wounded and sick, wandering the alien forests and fields.

**W**ALKER RETURNED to the United States embittered, sulking, convinced that he had been betrayed. The regime of *El Presidente* Walker, it seemed, was at an end.

But in New Orleans, thousands of supporters gathered to cheer their hero. Invigorated by the public support, *El Filibustero* was soon planning a reconquest. He traveled to Mobile and then to New York, speaking to throngs of admirers, most of whom generously opened their pocketbooks.

His humiliating losses in Nicaragua now seemed only minor impediments to the cause, mere irritants. Thousands of new soldiers, Walker knew, could be found; more ships awaited outfitting. The unvanquished crusader would forge on.

For American politicians, the Walker factor continued to wedge stubbornly in the middle of the national debate over the extension of slavery. Many Southerners still hoped that the annexation of Nicaragua and other Central American nations could turn the balance of power squarely on the side of proslavery interests.

A U.S. Navy lieutenant wrote in 1857 that public sentiment in the South was strongly in favor of the filibuster expeditions. They were, he wrote, "a frequent theme of conversation . . . in the streets, and at the hotels; and further, that there seemed to be an idea pervading . . . that Washington rather winked at the fitting out and departure of these expeditions."

President James Buchanan and his advisors seemed perplexed by Walker. As the "Conqueror" traveled the country preparing for another assault on Central America, the Administration issued warnings, made public declarations, sent vague, often conflicting instructions to its diplomats and military commanders. Filibusterism was a violation of the neutrality laws, the Administration noted. Any individuals discovered to be engaged in preparing a military expedition against a foreign nation must be detained. The rhetoric, though lacking explicit instructions on how to stop Walker, sounded genuine, even tough.

And yet Walker went about his work with apparent impunity. Considering the popular appeal enjoyed by the "Conqueror" and the support he drew from many Southern Democratic politicians, Buchanan was reluctant to take vigorous action against him. Indeed, Walker himself met privately with the President in Washington in June 1857 and later claimed that Buchanan had encouraged him to return to Nicaragua.

**O**N NOVEMBER 14, 1857, aboard the steamer *Fashion*, Walker, with more than 150 men and a supply of arms, left Mobile for Central America. Additional ships and men prepared to leave from other ports. Eleven days later the "Immortals" landed at Punta Arenas, near San Juan del Norte. Walker had returned; the



reconquest of Nicaragua had begun.

But before the campaign could get seriously underway, the invaders' plans were ignominiously squelched. Commodore Hiram Paulding, flag officer commanding the U.S. Home Squadron, took President Buchanan's instructions to heart. On December 8, 1857 a detachment of three hundred Marines and sailors arrested Walker and his officers and put them aboard the USS *Saratoga*. Paulding sent them back to the United States.

Many Southerners erupted in fury over the arrest. Georgia Senator Alexander Stephens urged that Paulding be court-martialed. The commodore, said Stephens, had no authority to make an arrest on foreign soil. More than two dozen other Southern senators agreed. Even Buchanan, although applauding Paulding's motives, lamented the Navy officer's breach of authority.

Northern politicians, in turn, denounced the Southern reaction. Walker, they charged, was a thug who had led a lawless band of highwaymen against a foreign nation in violation of the United States' neutrality laws. He was a criminal, not a hero. Walker, they claimed, was a tool of Southern slave interests.

Meanwhile, the indefatigable Walker, who had taken to signing his letters "Commander-in-Chief, Army of Nicaragua," was brought to New York and interrogated by U.S. marshals. There he met Secretary of State Lewis Cass. The Secretary had made no secret of his admiration for Walker and of his own support for the filibustering missions. He had earlier declared, "The difficulties which General Walker has encountered and overcome will place his name high on the roll of the distinguished men of his age."

In May 1858 Walker was tried in New Orleans for violating neutrality laws. Ten of the twelve jurors voted for acquittal, and he was released.

**W**ALKER LOST NO TIME in planning yet another expedition. Touring the South, he sought new recruits. In Mississippi he appealed to mothers "to bid their sons buckle on the armor of war, and battle for the institutions, for the honor of the Sunny South."

The "Sunny South" listened and responded with both men and money.

In December 1858 Walker sailed from Mobile, departing without clearance papers from the port collector, in defiance of the federal government. Off British Honduras, about sixty miles from the Nicaraguan coast, his ship struck a reef and sank. Walker was rescued by a British warship and returned to the South on New Year's Day 1859, to another tumultuous welcome.

The intractable Walker made one more try. Traveling in small groups, ninety-seven filibusters rendezvoused in Honduras in the fall of 1860, where they hoped to join forces with former Honduras President Trinidad Cabañas, who was leading a Liberal revolt in that country. From there Walker hoped to invade Nicaragua and Costa Rica, and to reinstate the Central American federation.

Going on the offensive, Walker decided to attack a

stone fortress that guarded the Honduran port of Truxillo. He planned to take the town, join Cabañas, and then take the country. Walker's raid was successful, and he raised the colors of the old Central American federation over the fort.

British authorities, upset when Walker declared Truxillo a free port (all customs revenue there had been previously assigned to the British government), felt compelled to intervene with military force. The warship *Icarus*, commanded by Captain Norvell Salmon, arrived at Truxillo, and Salmon ordered Walker to surrender. But Walker and his men fled in search of Cabañas's jungle encampment. A strong force of Honduran soldiers followed them.

The Hondurans eventually stopped Walker, trapping him in a swampy region near the Rio Negro. Salmon, in one of two British boats to sail up the river, again demanded Walker's surrender.

This time Walker did not resist.

The filibuster believed he was surrendering to a representative of the British government, but Salmon had other ideas. He turned Walker over to Honduran officials.

On September 12, 1860 a Honduran firing squad executed Walker, forever closing the infamous gray eyes.

**A**N EXCEEDINGLY COMPLEX MAN—beset by visions of fame and indestructability, harboring in his puritanical mind demons only he would ever see, obsessed by causes he only vaguely understood, possessing an acute intelligence somehow gone askew—Walker, with few devices beyond his own ambition, cunning, and drive, had made an extraordinary impact.

Walker's raids had exacerbated the debate in the United States over slavery's extension. That debate would soon end violently in the American Civil War.

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William Walker's legacy is with us still. ★

*Roger Bruns is director of publications of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission in Washington, D.C. His latest book is The Damndest Radical: The Life and World of Ben Reitman, published by the University of Illinois Press. His article, "Of Miracles and Molecules: The Story of Nylon" appeared in the December 1988 issue of this magazine.*

*A free-lance researcher who specializes in military history, Bryan Kennedy lives in the Washington, D.C. area.*



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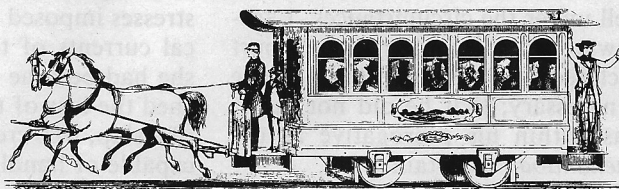
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February, 1989

## Shenandoah *Continued from page 33*

later found guilty of a number of charges arising from his outspoken criticism of his military superiors.

Mrs. Lansdowne subsequently returned to Lakehurst—not to the Naval Air Station, but to the nearby town—where she raised her son and became a reporter.

The Court of Inquiry found no improprieties in the Navy's ordering the flight, its route, or its timing. Weather had been excellent during the week before the flight. Thunderstorms had been predicted for Ohio but were expected to fall well north of the dirigible's path. All evidence indicated that Lansdowne and his crew had handled the *Shenandoah* well under the circumstances. Lansdowne had full authority, the court declared, to change the ship's course if necessary; that he did not do so was within his prerogative as the *Shenandoah*'s captain.

Because so much material was missing at the crash sites by the time Naval investigators could examine

the remains, the court could not determine if an inherent weakness in the airship's construction had precipitated a chain reaction that destroyed critical structural members. Nor could it determine whether or not the removal of automatic valves from many of the gas cells had caused the cells to explode when the *Shenandoah* exceeded her pressure altitude. The court decided that a substitute system that used hand toggles to jettison helium had been properly utilized.

The court concluded that the *Shenandoah* "was destroyed by being broken in two and precipitated to the ground by the aerodynamic stresses imposed on her by the vertical currents of the squall in which she had become entrapped." It likened the loss of the dirigible to that of a ship, well crewed and physically capable of handling stresses reasonably expected to be put upon her, that strikes an iceberg unexpectedly, and sadly but simply is lost. A

chance. A happenstance. Regrettable, but one of life's misfortunes that must be accepted.

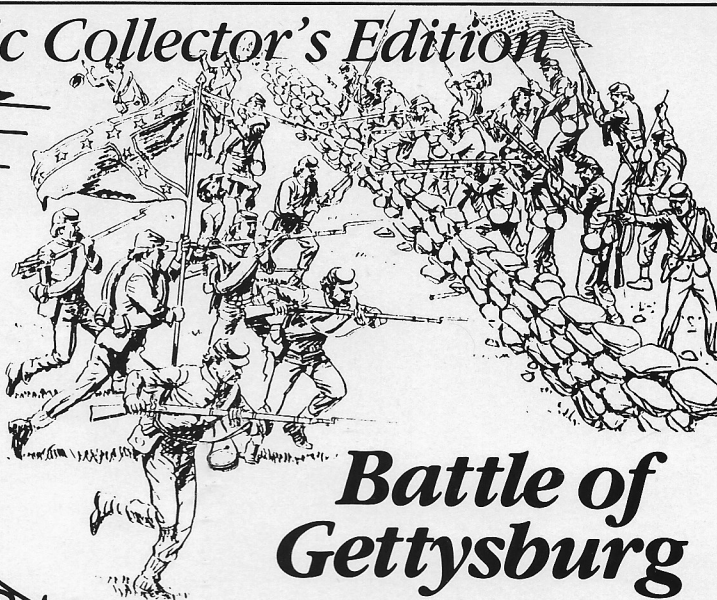
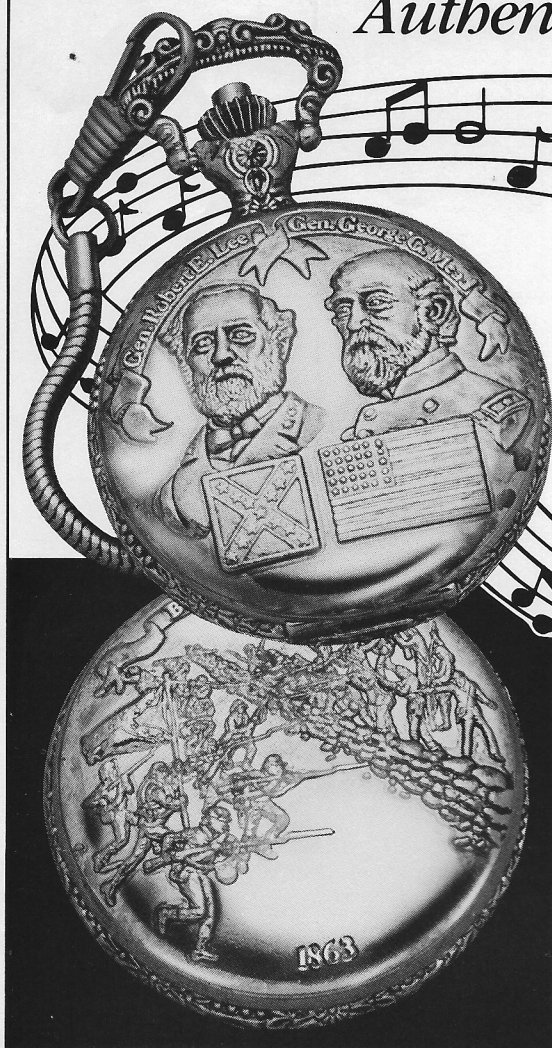
The loss of the *Shenandoah* seriously set back—but did not halt—the Navy's rigid airship program. On November 25, 1925, the Bureau of Aeronautics recommended a comprehensive five-year program for dirigible development. It called for the construction of two new large airships to be built as adjuncts to the fleet at a cost of \$4,500,000.

Not until the losses of the Navy dirigibles *Akron* (off the New Jersey coast in April 1933) and *Macon* (off Point Sur, California in February 1935) did the promise and the dream end. ★

*Free-lance writer James W. Wensyel, a retired Army colonel, is Deputy Director of Publications, Association of Graduates, U.S. Military Academy. The author of several books and numerous articles, he resides with his wife in Cornwall, New York.*



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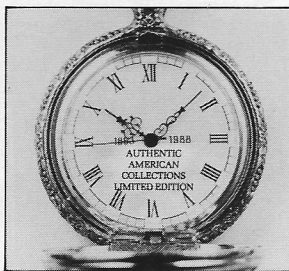
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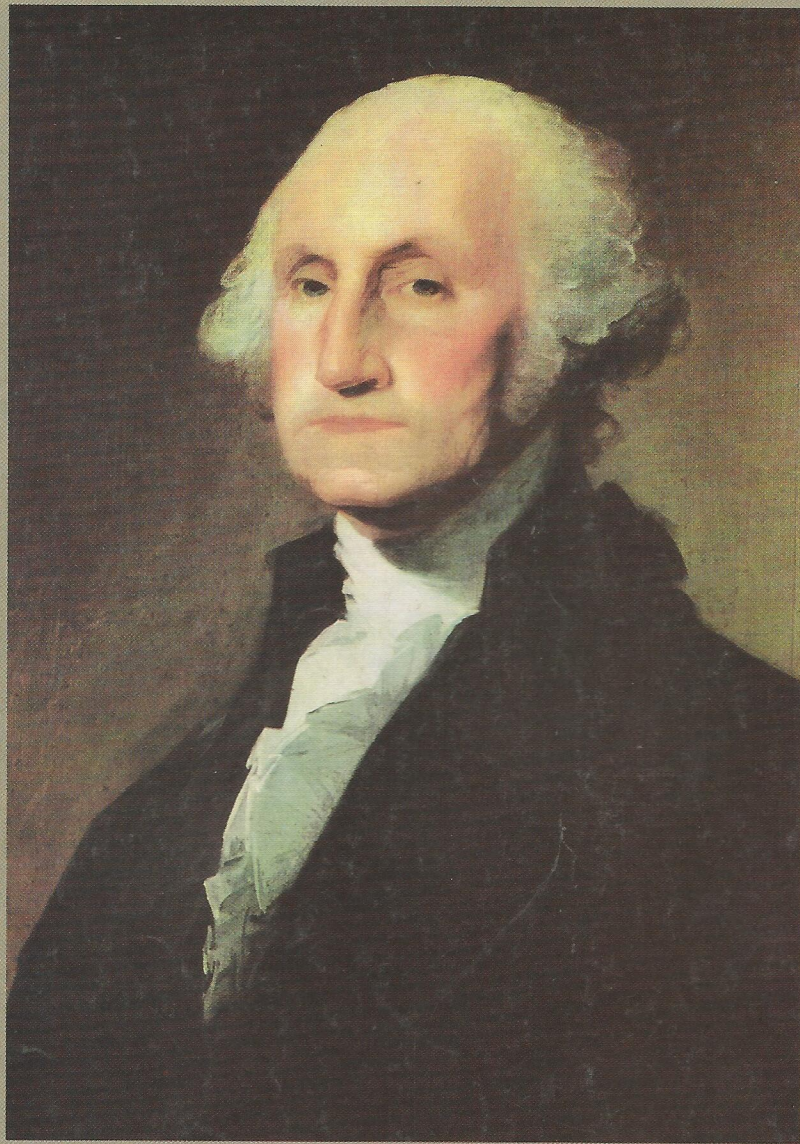
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